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# LADY LIVINGSTON'S LEGACY.

A Novel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"LADY FLAVIA," "LORD LYNN'S WIFE,"  
ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



LONDON:  
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

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## CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. FOR ENGLAND, HO ! . . . .	2
II. CANADIAN MEMORIES . . . .	24
III. THE FOUNTAINS . . . .	42
IV. THE PICTURE ON THE WALL . . .	68
V. IN THE GARDEN . . . .	86
VI. CONTAINS AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE .	115
VII. MESSRS. GOODEVE'S CLERK . . .	133
VIII. MR. DAVIS AT HOME . . . .	157
IX. THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT . .	181
X. THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS . . . .	211
XI. BY THE BOATHOUSE . . . .	230
XII. DOING BUSINESS WITH THE BEHEMOTH .	262
XIII. UNDER THE SCREW . . . .	287






# LADY LIVINGSTON'S LEGACY.

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## CHAPTER I.

FOR ENGLAND, HO!

“EEP her away—steady there at the helm—three parts speed, if you like, captain; the current will do the rest,” said the pilot, as the good steamship “Quebec,” homeward bound, glided rapidly down the mighty stream of the St. Lawrence, on her way to the sea.

It was the late autumn, emphatically styled the Fall, when the warmth of the so-called Indian summer is succeeded by the first signs of the coming winter. The

dense masses of virgin forest, as yet un-cleared by the axe of the settler, which here and there clothed the summit of some bold bluff along the river's bank, were royally robed in flaming scarlet and deep crimson, in russet, orange, and gold. Somewhat of the mellow warmth and softened radiance of the genial weather yet lingered, but from time to time a gust of keen wind chilled the air, as if in warning of what was to come; while the crisp red leaves were whirled in showers from the trees that overhung the water, and dropped, swirling, into the eddies below.

"We shall be the last boat, I reckon, that will get down the Big Drink this year," said the "Quebec's" first officer, a gaunt, lank-haired citizen of the Great Republic. "A cold snap's a-coming, or my name is not Ephraim Jones. Lucky if we don't get jammed in the ice-pack, moving south, outside Anticosti."

It *was* late, and the glorious autumn that

had lasted so long in the ripe perfection of its beauty, was beginning to droop before the frigid breath of conquering winter. Already the far-off cliffs of Labrador were ribbed in sevenfold ice; the bergs were moving southward in glistening pageant, like so many floating islands of shimmering crystal; and soon the north-west wind would come howling over the Red River prairies, bearing on its mighty wings the snow that should enwrap the northern portion of the continent as in a fair white shroud.

It was high time for those who did not wish to pass their long winter in Canada to seek shelter elsewhere. A good many passengers were on board of the "Quebec"—officers coming home on leave, colonists visiting the mother-country on business, stray tourists returning to pour the contents of their note-books, and their holiday experiences of bears and buffaloes, Yankees and mosquitoes, into octavo volumes of

print. There were also one or two families bound for Europe, whose ostensible purpose was education for the junior branches ; although it is possible that titled husbands for the elder sisters, whose gay hats and velvet jackets were conspicuous on the deck, might also form an important, if unacknowledged, item in the maternal programme. Almost unnoticed among all these, yet well deserving of observation on a wider stage than that afforded by the holy-stoned deck-planks of the packet, was the tall and graceful figure of a young girl, who appeared not to belong to any of the loquacious groups around her.

"Isn't that Miss Violet Maybrook, yonder by the binnacle ? It must be awkward for the poor girl, if she is quite alone," said a good-natured, grizzle-headed major of artillery, who stood beside the brass-rimmed cabin stairs.

"Oh no ; the captain, old Morrison, takes charge of her. But there is really no diffi-

culty for a lady travelling by herself, either in the States or the Dominion," answered the Canadian to whom he spoke ; " though, I dare say, she does feel herself a little lonesome at the change."

Meanwhile, the subject of these remarks stood apart, looking wistfully, as it seemed, on the fast receding shores of the broadening river, the gleaming surface of which was dotted by fishing-skiffs, and wave-washed rafts of rough-hewn timber floating down to Quebec ; and diversified here and there by some green group of fairy islets, whose willows dipped their yellowing branches in the rippling water, and where the mimosa and the maple flourished among the rocks that marred the rank luxuriance of the long grass. She was young—not more than two and twenty at the most—and her face was one to which the most fastidious critic could scarcely have denied the praise due to a rare loveliness ; yet her features were far from being

regular, and her complexion was of a creamy whiteness, untouched by any warmer tint. What struck the observer most was the exceeding beauty of the eyes—those large, dark, passionate eyes, fringed with coal-black lashes, that looked strangely long and heavy when they rested on her soft cheek. She had a wealth of raven hair, that rendered her independent of the chignon-maker's art; and her delicate mouth was well shaped, with red lips that were perhaps a little too firm. She was simply, even plainly, dressed, and her demeanour was quiet and unassuming; but there was an unstudied grace in all her movements, and what she wore became her better than was the case with the much more brilliantly attired colonial belles chatting and laughing at the distance of a few paces.

The girl from time to time withdrew her pensive eyes from shorewards, and glanced inquiringly, and perhaps im-

patiently, along the deck, as if in search of some one whose appearance was unduly delayed.

“ Well, Miss Maybrook,” said a masculine voice at last, as its owner approached her, and stood, as if waiting for her to speak. A tall, fair-haired man of some thirty years of age, well-dressed and well-looking, with even a certain charm of voice and manner, but yet with a nameless something in his tone and lineaments, that, to a heedful physiognomist, should have cried, Beware ! There was some craft, but no intellect, in that low white brow, from beneath which the blue eyes looked out so boldly ; some tenacity in that square jaw, with its white teeth just shining through the heavy moustache of golden tawny hue ; but the expression of the lips was sensual, hard, and cruel. Women are not, ordinarily speaking, very severe judges of the character that underlines a showy exterior ; and yet the new-comer winced perceptibly



as his eye met those of the girl whom he had addressed.

"Well, Sir Frederick Dashwood?" she said, in measured accents, and almost, as it seemed, with a touch of sarcasm in her tone; then, after pausing in vain for a reply, she added, petulantly; "Is that all you have to say to me?"

He laughed, stroking, meanwhile, with his strong white hand, sparkling with more rings than most men wear in these days of careless attire and easy manners, the fair moustache that shaded his upper lip. It was a low laugh, not good to hear, hard and sardonic rather; but his voice was pleasant enough when he said: "Never mind the Sir Frederick just now, Violet. I have not been long enough used to the blushing honours of my baronetcy to feel the omission of the title—such as it is. Besides, you were not always so formal. It was 'Fred,' wasn't it, Violet, a little time ago?"

And as he spoke, he bent over her, and

looked into her face, and it was wonderful to see how the girl's proud eyes softened, and how rapidly her whole expression changed, as a gloomy landscape brightens under a gleam of sunshine.

"If I could trust you—if I could do that," she murmured, as if her thoughts had found unbidden utterance; but his ear was quick, and he caught the sounds, low and hardly audible as they were.


"You can," he answered, earnestly but gently; "and you must. It is too late in the day, now, for either of us to hang back, where *that* is concerned."

"Yes; that is true, though you say it," returned the girl, speaking in the same dreamy manner as before. "Whoever is free, you and I are bound to confidence. If you loved me—but that was an idle fancy—I should have something to cling to, some one plank of safety in the storm that must one day burst upon me. But if that cannot be——"

"It can ; believe me that it can," interrupted Sir Frederick, eagerly, but in cautious accents. "You are restless and unreasonable to-day, Violet ; and see ! all those gossiping fools yonder are staring at us. Come with me a few steps, here on the poop, and let us appear to be contemplating the prospect as we talk. We shall attract less remark in that way."

Violet Maybrook allowed him to lead her to the raised portion of the deck beyond the wheel, whence a better view of the receding shores could be obtained, and there leant against the vessel's taffrail, with her eyes fixed, as before, on the darkening masses of the forest, the fields where fence and fallow were fast growing blurred and indistinct as the shadows deepened, and the rocks that rose, bare and ghostly, from amid the shallow waters near the bank.

"See !" she said, pointing towards a group of tiny islets, over which hovered a



white haze that crept upwards and onwards ; “ see how the mist takes shape, and seems to follow us like a troop of sheeted spectres ; while yonder, again, it lies spread over the meadows like a silver fleece. But I forgot. You are like Peter Bell, and to you a yellow primrose is a yellow primrose, and nothing more, Frederick.”

“ Well, I don’t know about that,” replied the young man, frankly enough ; “ it is true, I’m not literary and so on ; but when a thing is pretty, I suppose I see it. A silver fleece, eh ? By Jove, I wish it was !” And this time his laugh was good-humoured, for his torpid fancy was tickled by the suggestion.

“ How you worship money !” rejoined Miss Maybrook, with somewhat of scorn in her voice ; but the baronet coolly answered :

“ Of course I do ; I never saw much of it, you know, though I had credit in plenty once, which is all very well till the smash

comes, and then a fellow finds out the difference. Come, Violet, you are trying to put me out of temper ; but it won't do, so we may as well be friends. I wonder what you'll say of London ?”

“ I scarcely expect to see much of this wonderful London of yours,” said Miss Maybrook. “ The Right Honourable the Dowager Lady Livingston—yes, I think I am accurate as to the designation of my noble employer—resides at Richmond, you may remember, not in London. And it could make little difference to me, as her salaried companion, whether her house, the Fountains, be in ‘ town,’ as you call it, or in the country. I know, from books, something of the old country, and something, too, of the sort of life I shall have to lead, and I assure you that I do not cherish any very rose-coloured ideas of what lies before me.”

There was a suppressed bitterness in the tone in which these words were

uttered, which was not lost upon the hearer.

"Upon my word," he said, hastily, "I think you will not find things half so bad as you fancy them. The dowager always hated me——"

"What singularly bad taste!" murmured Violet ; but the irony of the remark produced no effect on Sir Frederick's evident determination to retain his good-humour unruffled.

"Well, but she did," he continued ; "always disliked me from a boy—you know there's some relationship through my mother—and when I was a child, I was always getting into the old lady's black-books by teasing her fat brute of a lapdog, making her parrot scream, and tumbling amongst her china ; but she can be kind, and generous too, where she takes a fancy. Some of these old women are terrible Tartars ; but I don't think you will have much to complain of with her. She

is an awfully rich woman ; and though she calls herself an invalid, she does entertain now and then, and dooced liberally, I can tell you ; and she's well thought of by the great guns of London society, the slow ones, I mean, such as Lady Blunderbore, the Duchess of Snowdon, and all that heavy lot. I dare say there will be lawn-parties in summer, and boating-parties, and the rest of it. If you can tide over the time until the fine weather comes, I dare say you won't be moped beyond bearing. And I shall run down when I can, and, at worst, it will only be a temporary thing, this engagement of yours. I must have time, of course, to look about me, and to see how the governor's affairs really stood, and if I have inherited anything beyond the handle to my name ; and then——”

“ And then I shall come to your home, and be your wife, Fred, shall I not ?” interrupted Violet, watching him narrowly, as if to mark the effect which her words

should produce. He did not make an immediate reply, but stood lazily twisting the ends of his thick moustache, meditating, it may be, on the answer that he must give, and at length he said, deliberately, and in the manner of one who weighs every word :

“Yes, Violet, I hope so—that is, at any rate, the theory of the thing ; but then there may be difficulties, yes, and delays, about carrying out this little scheme of ours. You women have a way of over-leaping obstacles, steeple-chase fashion, and going slapdash over every impediment that lies in the way of matrimony. I’m sure, Vi, that I take it as a compliment, and I suppose you must be fond of a fellow, to be ready to share the fortunes of one who may, if the last letter of those plodding old attorneys is but near the truth, turn out only that most pitiable of paupers, a pauper with a title. But I am bound to think for both ; and being older than you,



and having seen more of the world, and so forth, to see that I have a home for you to be mistress of, before I ask you to come to it. Do you understand me, Violet ?”

“I think I do,” returned the girl, with curling lip and flashing eyes, “though seldom has selfishness been more elegantly masked. You are afraid, is it not so, to drag me—me, Violet Maybrook—whom you love so well, and to whom you owe so much, down to poverty ? That is the gist of your pretty oration. Well, but if I do not fear poverty ? If a small income and a struggling life have no terrors for me, will you dare to confess yourself less brave, less fitted to face the trials of life, than is the woman whom you have sworn to love ?”

The scorn that broke forth in her ringing voice and passionate gesture was not lost upon the baronet ; yet he bore it, to all appearance, stoically enough. There was no frown on his low brow, no angry sparkle in his steel-blue eye, and his

voice was gentle, and almost caressing, as he said :

“ It is because I do care so much for you, my little Violet, that I am content to be called selfish, rather than to do you serious harm. You tell me that you don’t fear poverty ; but that is precisely because you do not know what poverty, in its true, old-world, European, humiliating sense, implies. I don’t myself believe that any man is thoroughly poor if he has not, in some sense, come down in the world, slid, that is, to a lower level than that to which he has been accustomed. When I was quartered in the west of Ireland, I have envied the appetite with which those poor Connemara bogtrotters devoured their dishful of potatoes—not, mind, the mealy, floury vegetables that you Canadians born call “ Irish ” potatoes, but black lumpers, that look as inviting as a mess of horse-beans. Your only notion of poverty, Violet, is shabby furniture, a bad dinner, and

scanty fuel. Mine is one which comprises duns, debt, endless lies to stave off the creditor from week to week, a smiling face kept up before the world when the heart is half breaking, sickly children pining for good food and pure air, shams, insults. Care night and day as an inmate of the house, and everything aggravated by the necessity for keeping a smooth face before a society that votes misfortune a bore, sorrow a bore, ruin a bore, and that hardly permits a man or woman to die in peace unless well-feed doctors issue daily bulletins, and Mr. Banting himself conducts the funeral ceremonies. On my soul, Violet, what I say is true!"

He had commenced his speech in sugared accents, and guardedly withal; but as he went on, his voice had gathered force and volume, and he spoke with all the conviction of one who acts a part no longer, but believes sincerely in the solid truth of every word. Miss Maybrook her-

self, though perhaps by nature distrustful, and doubly so by habit where this man was concerned, could not help admitting to herself that what he had said was probably, to the best of his belief, true.

"This last letter from old Sir George's lawyers," she said, after a pause, "what was its exact purport? You have mentioned it to me before we sailed, but you said little about it. I merely gathered from your words that your grandfather was not so rich as you supposed him to be."

"You shall see the letter itself to-morrow, or to-night," returned Dashwood, seriously: "I want to keep nothing back from you. No; it seems, unless the lawyers are out of their reckoning, that the old man was not, close and sly as he was about money matters, the shrewd, old, tight-fisted miser I have for years believed him to be. His papers were so muddled, and the hiding-places where he kept his securities so hard to come at, that Nupen and Smink—a

decent firm in Lincoln's Inn—they once compromised with some money-lenders for me, at Sir George's request—cannot make out whether my grandfather was rich, or as poor as Job : they are attorneys, and therefore, as seeing plenty of the shady side of life, think the latter. There is no will, and I take what there is ; but every Jew in London holds a bit of stamped paper with my signature to it ; and if I had not sailed for Canada when I did, my address would have been Whitecross Street, E.C. I know the tribes well, Violet, and that they always give a promising fish plenty of line. They won't immediately, now I come back as Sir Frederick, pounce on me, as they would have done on poor Fred Dashwood of the Lancers. No, no ; they will consider that I may get a lump of money, somehow, out of my grandfather's succession, or that I may—I don't like to say it, Violet, for fear you should fire up again, my dear, but——”

"Speak, pray, without fear of any outbreak on my part," said Violet, wearily: "you were going to say that the people to whom you owe money might think——"

"That I was likely to marry money. An heiress, you see, Vi, is generally the resource of a man like myself; and Moss, and Abrahams, and the rest of them know well enough that some little party or other, whose papa has made a fortune in long-cloths or Manchester printed cottons, would not object to be called Lady Dashwood. Everything commands a price, and a title can be quoted in the marriage-market just as freely as any other commodity. You need not mind what I say about that. I have no intention of selling myself for a dowry—break stones on the road sooner, or take the shilling as a private in the old regiment—but I only mention it to show that the Hebrews would set upon me tooth and nail, if I began my career in England by marrying for love."

"For love, Frederick Dashwood? Say, rather, for fear," haughtily rejoined the girl, as she turned her flashing eyes full upon his provokingly calm face. "Do you think I do not read you, and know you, and that I do not see that you would play me false, and leave me to flutter on my aimless course, like a dead leaf blown before the wind, if you only dared to risk a breach between us? But you do not dare it. Enough of these excuses. You have asked for time to settle your affairs, and you shall have it, free from any importunity of mine. Who is, may I ask, this young girl, this Miss—Miss—I forget the name, now on a visit to Lady Livingston, as Mrs. Dashwood's letter informs me?"

"I suppose you mean my cousin Beatrice—Beatrice Fleming—a nearer relation to the dowager that I am," answered Sir Frederick, half sullenly. "She is a favourite, and often there."

"A favourite, and your cousin, and


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young, and pretty perhaps," said Violet Maybrook, slowly. " Ah, well, I shall soon see her, and judge for myself. Come, it is dark, and we can stay here no longer ; so I will take your arm, if you please, and join the company yonder. I have one consolation, Fred—you dare not, even if you would, be false to me."



## CHAPTER II.

### CANADIAN MEMORIES.

“ DON'T care, not the snapping of a gun-flint, not the scale of a pickerel, for the reasons why it should be so. There must be something wrong about the man, something worse, I mean, than his being a horse-jockey and a pippin”—(which last colonial colloquialism for a scapegrace fell flat enough on the English ears of the audience)—“something worse even than his being a conceited dangler after the foolish women who are taken by his looks and his London airs. There always is something


wrong about a chap for whom nobody has a good word: I learned that during the eight or nine and twenty years I have sat on the bench of our supreme court yonder," said a keen-featured elderly man, whose glistening gray hair matched well with a face that was shrewd, but not unkindly of aspect.

"Can't say, I'm sure, judge!" rejoined one of the listeners, a pale lieutenant of engineers. "Dashing Dashwood—he brought the sobriquet with him from the Plunger regiment he belonged to before he exchanged into the infantry, and was quartered here—is, so I have always heard, not half-bad."

"Which means, that he has not been detected in cheating at cards, pays his bets on settling-day, is never seen intoxicated, and has not, in short, done anything to forfeit the character of an officer and a gentleman," said the judge, very austere. "It is just those men whom your British

slang calls 'not half-bad' who do thrice the harm that a branded and transparent scoundrel can work. I speak strongly, gentlemen, but that is because I feel strongly. It is Captain Dashwood, and such as he, who earn your cloth a bad name among us plain colonials. But I think I can safely say that no man, and no woman, was ever anything but the worse for having to do with this redcoat Lothario, whose fellow-passengers we have the privilege to be."

"You are hard on the young fellow, 'pon my word, judge, you are," said the honest captain of the "Quebec," in whose cabin, around a table whereon were bottles and glasses of various shape and dimensions, a knot of male passengers sat conversing as they smoked their cigars, and imbibed those iced beverages, juleps, smashes, coblers, and stone fences, so called, which are plentiful in Atlantic steam-packets. "Very likely the lad never



Cano


When handed in 27  
h. m.  
2.40

had a ch  
start the pace  
neatricals here,  
endless balls and  
s, the regimental drag  
of thorough-breds matched  
blind-hookey in the small hours,  
every contrivance to help the poorer of  
them down the steep road to ruin. That  
was his father, I suppose, that Sir George  
who died the other day?"

"No, it was his grandfather," said a pert  
little tourist, who had borne the tribu-  
lations of prairie travel and Far West  
savagery for the express purpose of being  
a lion, next May, in London society.  
"Everybody knew that old fogey, and his  
pill-box with the big brown horses, when  
he was still a practising physician in Jek  
Street. He was very old, had been m  
a baronet by George IV., and pouc  
more fees at one time than any fashionab  
doctor in town. He ought to have saved

slang calls 'not half-bad' who do thrice the harm that a branded and transparent scoundrel can work. I speak strongly, gentlemen, but that is because I feel strongly. It is Captain Dashwood, and such as he, who earn your cloth a bad name among us plain colonials. But I think I can safely say that no man, and no woman, was ever anything but the worse for having to do with this redcoat Lothario, whose fellow-passengers we have the privilege to be."

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children to be real aristocrats ; and the younger of the two indulged the parental fancy by going into the army, flinging about his golden sovereigns at such a rate that it must have puzzled the doctor to supply them, and marrying a lady of very old stock, the Honourable Louisa Fleming, who was ten years his senior, and had been brought out in the London marriage-market when Fred Dashwood—Fred *primus*, we may call him—got his first birching at Eton, and deserved it too, as I have heard my governor say, for a wilder pickle never lived ; and indeed he didn't live very long—it's the pace that kills—and hard-drinking, a hide-and-seek career, late hours, and the Queen's Bench prison, made an end of Captain Dashwood. His wife is alive, in some Bath or Cheltenham boarding-house, they say, living on allowance from the old doctor. I hope her son will be dutiful enough to pay it as punctually. As for Philip, Sir George never liked him, thought

him a poor-spirited creature, without the pluck to get into debt ; and when Phil set the seal to his disgrace by marrying a good girl, the daughter of a country parson, whom he had known as governess in some family at which Mr. Dashwood visited, the old man fairly shut the door in his son's face, and cast him off, in fact, as a disgrace to the budding genealogical tree of the Dashwoods.

“ Well, it was easy to send Philip to the rightabout, to scratch his name out of a will, and to return his letters unopened ; but the old medico had no more power to deprive Esau of his birthright, the succession to the baronetcy, than—than scores of men have, peers and commoners, who hate the future occupant of their very comfortable shoes. He had emigrated, Philip had ; and some distant connections of his wife being established in Montreal, he settled there, set up as a merchant—he had some few hundred pounds, inherited

from his mother's relations, to begin with, and throve tolerably well. Then he died, as you know, and the poor little boy died too—an accident, wasn't it—ice-breaking, or something of that sort? and so Sir George died, and Frederick the Second reigns in his place. But I suspect Sir Frederick will not have much to reign over, since the old man was hard hit by the smash of three or four bubble companies, as I happen to know. I suppose the captain will have to look out for some minor heiress who wants to be called 'My Lady.'"

Somebody here observed that the baronet seemed to admire that pretty Miss Maybrook, and wondered how she would approve of such fortune-hunting arrangements as had been suggested. The judge shook his head.

"The sooner that young lady learns to forget him, the better I should say," was his out-spoken opinion. "They are ac-



quaintances of long date now—she and he were muffins all last winter, and——”

“Excuse me, judge,” interrupted the dapper tourist, taking out his pocket-book ; “I really must ask for a word of explanation regarding that term muffins. I thought I knew a thing or two, but——”

“But not the natural history of the Canadian muffin,” said the judge with a chuckle. “True, yours has been a summer visit to the Dominion, or you would have been aware that, in the best society of our cities, young ladies and gentlemen pair off for the season, at sleighing-parties, snow picnics, skating, dancing, and taboggining. It is a custom which temporary residents, like our military friends here, are found to take to kindly enough.”

“Quite true !” said the engineer lieutenant, smiling at the bewildered incredulity that was visible in the traveller’s face. “It is rather a serious thing, though, as regards making a good choice. Your

business is to drive out your muffin, wrapped in warm furs, as fast as the galloping horses can whirl the sleigh along, to dance with your muffin, escort her everywhere, and so forth. No chaperons, capital fun, and no harm done to anybody. Must not change, though; always a row if you do that. Instead of a partner for a dance, you take one for a Canada winter."

"Which often leads, I presume, to a partnership for life, unless you are laughing at my ignorance?" observed the tourist.

"Often, but not always," answered the judge. "But Mr. Scarper was right when he said that nobody was the worse for the practice; and indeed our Canadian girls, with all their buoyant spirits and innocent mirth, are quite capable of taking care of themselves. Sometimes an unpleasantness does occur."

"Ah, yes," said another officer; "as when young Larpent shot Jack Lovelace at the skating rink—Lovelace of the Fusi-

liers—because of some wrong or other done to his sister; and the jury found him not guilty at the trial, you remember, judge? ‘Served him right,’ would have been a better verdict still. By-the-by, he was a friend of Dashing Dashwood’s. Birds of a feather, eh? I was with the detachment at Toronto most of the cold season myself; but I was in the way of hearing the Montreal town-talk, and when Willis dropped into the messroom with the news that that youngster, Larpent—he was scarcely seventeen—had loaded his revolver, and pulled trigger on that unlucky Jack, before the eyes of all the gay company skating quadrilles by gaslight to the music of a military band, we all agreed that it was just what might have been expected, and that Dashwood’s turn might not unlikely come next. But Miss Maybrook, to judge by her looks and that proud carriage of her head, is of a different stamp from little Aphy Larpent that I

remember seeing in Toronto. She was governess, or companion, or something, in the house of Mrs. Dashwood, was she not ?”

“She was,” the judge replied—“companion, that is, to Mrs. Dashwood, and governess to little Charley, and mother and child were both very much attached to her—deservedly so, as I believe, for a better and more sweet-natured girl than Violet Maybrook never lived ; and her affection for the tiny boy—he was but six years old when he died, poor little fellow ; but that was a sad piece of business—won the mother’s heart. The widow was a kind, easy-tempered creature, who never forgot, as some ladies do, that a governess is a sentient human being like themselves, and not a mere teaching machine, to be laid on the shelf in the intervals of imparting a sound elementary education ; and Miss Violet was allowed a good deal of liberty, and was able to accept the many

invitations she received exactly as if she had been a niece or younger sister of her employer. She was allowed, too, as I have said, to associate with Captain Fred Dashwood, who was her constant companion in the many merry outdoor amusements with which we colonists enliven our long winter. Few ladies in England would have sanctioned such a degree of intimacy between a governess and her nephew, but out here we are more simple in our social habits; and besides, Mrs. Philip Dashwood perhaps remembered that she had herself once filled a similar position; but at any rate the fact was so.

“Then, in the bright spring weather, came the unlucky death of poor little Charley; and after that happened, the widow lost her health and spirits, and began to pine to go home to her own people, and to leave behind her the Canadian residence in which she had been twice left a mourner for the dead that were dear

to her. She was tolerably well off, and had many friends in Montreal, but she could not bear to remain, and has gone back to England and her relations. But her attachment to Miss Maybrook was not impaired; and she promised to exert herself to procure her some really good appointment in England, and has succeeded in doing so. That old Dowager—Lady Livingston is her name—who has engaged Miss Maybrook at a high salary, as her companion, is in some way a kinswoman of Captain Fred's mother, and there had always been some intercourse by letter maintained between Philip Dashwood and his fashionable brother's household; indeed, I fancy the captain did not scruple to borrow from the civilian when his purse was at low-water mark; and that the present Sir Frederick was also under pecuniary obligations to his colonial relatives. In the meantime Miss Violet resided with her parents, a mile or two out of Montreal,

worthy, struggling persons, who have a large family and a narrow income, and who naturally expect their young folks to shift for themselves as early as they can. Now she is bound for Europe ; and here, as you see, is Dashwood, a passenger in the same ship ; but I think I was not far wrong in saying that Miss Maybrook would act wisely in forgetting him, as he will her when once among familiar scenes and old associates."

Meanwhile, the steamship, aided by the might of the giant river's powerful current, rushed swiftly and surely on upon her way to the ocean, bearing with her the hopes and fortunes, the plans and aspirations, of a hundred passengers, every one of whom had doubtless his or her allotted part in the complicated drama of human life. A little corner of the veil, as concerned Violet Maybrook and Sir Frederick, had been lifted for the curious inspection of that segment of the public to be found on board of

the "Quebec;" but if something was known, and more guessed, regarding these two, how much might have lain beyond the reach either of research or of conjecture. Popular opinion, as a rule, was by far more lenient towards the handsome Canadian girl, going for the first time among absolute strangers to earn a precarious livelihood, than towards the titled Englishman with whom she paced the deck so often, and with whom she lingered so late beneath the white moonlight, against which the rigging stood out as if carved in ebony. That he was dissolute, selfish, utterly corrupt and lost, most of those who had any acquaintance with him knew, as by intuition; but with her the case was different. It was her misfortune, not her fault, that she loved such a one as he was.

That she did love him no one doubted. In spite of her pride, of the feminine delicacy that was innate in her, of the training which education imparts, she was unable




long to hide from even a dull-witted observer the fact that her heart was irrevocably given to this man, unworthy as he was. There were some of the lookers on who were sagacious enough to see that she despised him, that she mistrusted him, that she hated herself at times because she loved him, and yet that she was never happy but in his presence, never at ease but when he was beside her. One or two, keener than the rest, saw one thing more. Sir Frederick Dashwood, man of the world as he was, was nevertheless afraid of giving serious offence to this penniless little governess of Canada, though why it should be so was an enigma beyond their powers of solution. So the good ship "Quebec" proceeded on her way, past the heights of that fortress city whence she took her name, past the rocky islands that stud the mouth of the St. Lawrence, past the darkling cliffs of Anticosti, out into the dim gray waters of the measureless Atlantic,

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where already glistening castles, and steeples, and crags, and hillocks of translucent green and vivid blue, were rolling massively southwards before the arctic breeze. On she went, with her living freight of hopes, and cares, and fears, "homeward bound" for England.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FOUNTAINS.

HE Dowager Lady Livingston, being a valetudinarian, wealthy, and with no ties, chose to live near London, for the benefit, as she said, of the best medical advice. In London, however, she did not care to reside, being impatient of the encircling bonds of brick and mortar; and she had therefore pitched her tent, to quote her own words, at Richmond. The old lady's obstinate predilection for a suburban abode was a thorn in the flesh, and a weariness to the spirit, of more than one eminent pro-

fessor of the healing art. Sly old Sir Joseph Doublefee, who had pocketed so many guineas that his less lucky brethren regarded him as a sort of Midas, beneath whose touch all things were transmuted to gold, grumbled savagely to himself as his well-horsed chariot bore him to and from the Fountains. Blunt Dr. Sterling, with Abernethian bluffness of diction, told his noble patient that while so many sick persons craved his presence, he really could not spare the time to visit a lady to whom he could by no possibility do good. And as Dr. Sterling's fame was justly held in the profession to be second to none, it may easily be divined that the dowager's ailments were rather of a fanciful than of a serious nature.

Lady Livingston belonged, in fact, to that small but unfortunate class of persons, cursed with a superfluity of time and money, who conceive themselves to be chronically ill, and who would be as angry with the

meddlesome doctor who should convince them of their own complete cure, as was the Brahmin with the microscope that revealed animal life among the vegetables that were preparing for his Pythagorean repast. She was old, to be sure ; she had no daughters to marry off, no grandchildren to pet, no husband to manage. In person she was a thick-set, sturdily-built old woman, who could never in youth have been fair to look upon, but whose homely features and upright carriage seemed to defy the assaults of time. Nevertheless, one young doctor, a rising man, and who, perhaps, took the trouble to look a little deeper into the millstone of a patient's constitution than did his seniors at the top of the tree, shook his head ominously when he spoke of Lady Livingston, and made use, confidentially, of the irreverent phrase, "popping off," with reference to an unsuspected heart-complaint, of which he conceived himself to have discovered the as

yet obscure symptoms. In the meantime, the dowager continued, in lay estimation, to enjoy rude health.

The appellation of the Fountains was not, like those of most suburban residences, of a wildly imaginative character. There really were fountains ; no mere jets of the height of a fishing-rod and thickness of a walking-stick, but roomy marble basins, half-filled with stony allegory, with nymphs, tritons, nereids, dolphins, and the rest, who did on occasion spout forth from shell, and urn, and horn, and gaping fish-mouth, a considerable volume of tortured water—more, in fact, than the company on whose reservoirs the dwellers in those parts were dependent for the lymph, were at all times willing to supply. These fragments of petrified mythology were expensive relics of a bygone age and taste ; and the same might be said of the statuary and the formal terraces of the garden, the quincunx, the bowling-green, the clipped hedges of yew,

the fish-pond, and even the great old mansion itself, the bricks of which were of a ripe mellowness of tint, that told of many a frost and storm. The house had a history. It had been built when George III. was king, by a nabob, to employ the language of his contemporaries, and in imitation of the villa of some travelled nobleman of earlier date, whose dwelling and ornamental pleasure-grounds had evoked the admiring envy of the nabob in his boyhood, years before he went out to become collector, magistrate, and lieutenant-governor ; and to return yellow and bent, with no digestion worth mentioning, but with such savings as could be amassed in the old days of official jobbery and high-handed rule. The stripling's daydream had been carried into effect by the white-whiskered man, whose prime had been spent in storing up the wherewithal to gratify the whims of his declining years ; the mansion was built, the pleasure laid out, and the nabob lived

to smoke his hookah within hearing of the splash of the fountains whence his suburban residence took its name. It is likely that the reality was not so delightful as the project, and that the successful Indian administrator did not enjoy it very much. At any rate, it is certain that he did not enjoy it very long; and when he died, and his heirs fought tooth and nail over his will, the property fell into Chancery, and was neglected, as of course. It was not, when in the fullness of time a legitimate owner was found for it, what is called a lucky house, or one profitable to those who tried to make money by it. A school for young ladies, a private lunatic asylum, a hydropathic establishment, it broke down and became bankrupt in every one of these characters; while as a dwelling it was not much more fortunate. It was the despair of house-agents, who could rarely find a solvent tenant to inhabit a house so gloomy, and so costly as to its rent and surroundings; and it would no



doubt have been pulled down, and the gardens turned into eligible sites for crescents and terraces, had not Lady Livingston bought it, repaired it, and dwelt in it, as she had now done for several years.

The dowager was "at home," in the literal, not the social sense of the word, which latter was, with her, only applicable to the bright summer weather, before exhaustion and the grouse season had caused everybody to leave London. Then, indeed, there were pleasant days on which the dry fountains cast into the air their showers of glittering spray, when gay toilets enamelled the lawn, and fringed the terrace bordering on the Thames, and when the old house awoke to unwonted life at the sound of silvery laughter and the tread of many feet. In winter, however, Lady Livingston did not 'entertain,' and, indeed, hibernated tranquilly, inhabiting almost exclusively a little room on the first floor, with a southern aspect, certainly, but which commanded no

more extended prospect than that of a red peach-wall, nailed to which were sundry ancient fruit-trees, that in their wrappings of plaited straw seemed to hibernate too, as they awaited the welcome warmth of the next June sun.

A queer, little, three-cornered room it was, with some old-fashioned creeper, valued before gardeners knew the merits of climbing plants from America and Australia, trained so as to encircle the windows with its slender tendrils. Within, there were a few hot-house flowers, heedfully renewed as the branches grew ragged or the blossoms became thin ; a few books on shelves of dark wood ; some furniture of a bygone pattern, angular, ugly, but of rich materials and elaborate workmanship ; and a heterogeneous collection of objects, some of which were rare, others simply precious, but none new. A mandarin might have coveted those towering jars of antique porcelain, those sprawling dragons of old

Nankin manufacture, those frail cups of 'eggshell' china, that had been imported many a year since, before Taeping rebels had massacred the cunning craftsmen, and destroyed the ceramic treasures of the Central Kingdom. Those little pictures in frames, of which the gilding had been dimmed by years, were signed by mighty masters of the brush, long dead, and, as gems of the Dutch and Flemish schools, would have brought in much money under the hammer of the auctioneer. Those Sèvres cups, covered with an eighteenth century Arcadia of impossible shepherdesses and beribboned Corydons, were of the true "tender paste," incomparable for richness of colour, and of which no monarch could now gratify his wish for a new service; those quaint mirrors were of Venetian make, the like of which Wardour Street cannot produce; and the deep tints of the stained glass were of the lost blue and crimson of four hundred years ago.

But along with these were miscellaneous articles scarce worth the keeping—hideous miniatures, tawdry French toys, boxes from which the ladies of Louis XV.'s reign may have distributed sugar-plums to their friends, odd clocks that had not ticked for forty years, coral charms from Naples, silver-gilt monstrosities of the tasteless days that preceded Waterloo, ostrich eggs, and grotesque ivory idols from Siam or Pegu.

In this room, and in the midst of her hoarded *bricabrac*, sat Lady Livingston in the corner of her square-shaped, silk-covered sofa, engaged on some species of embroidery which she called white-stitch, and the delicate complexity of which would have approved itself a cruel trial to younger eyes than hers. The work proceeded very slowly, but it went on, nevertheless, for the dowager was proud of her powers of vision, and the renouncing of her accustomed task was a capitulation to the inroads of old age

that she was reluctant to make. So she plied her needle, by the help of her gold-rimmed glasses, and talked the while. Her ladyship's personal appearance has been already mentioned. She was not handsome, even with the venerable beauty that age sometimes lends to those who in youth were not accounted comely. But there was something in the shape of the massive forehead, in the undimmed brightness of the hawk-like eyes, in the very wrinkles that branched from the corners of the compressed lips, which expressed thoughtfulness and resolution, along with some pride, and what is called an uncertain temper. Throughout life this woman had met with scanty affection, possibly with no love, but with much respect, earned by her courage and her honesty of purpose. She had been a truth-teller from childhood upwards, and lost many a friend by her unseasonable plainness of speech, which no consideration of worldly prudence could

ever induce her to modify. Perhaps it was well for Lady Livingston that she had been born in the purple, so to speak, and was an heiress, for had she been less well-endowed and of humbler origin, her peculiarities might have stood seriously in her way. As it was, she was regarded as a privileged person, and was held in high esteem by some of those weighty ornaments of London society, such as the Marchioness of Blunderbore, the Duchess of Snowdon, and the like, whose prejudices she chanced to share, and to whose genuine opinions on things in general she had the daring to give utterance.

The other occupant of the room was a young and very pretty girl, by name Beatrice Fleming, a relative and a favourite of the dowager, whose guest she then was. Slight and small of figure, with brown hair and soft gray eyes, she was accurately described as very pretty; a sweet, tender little rose-bud of a girl, but not beautiful.

Violet Maybrook was beautiful ; but the one face called up quite a different train of ideas from that which was evoked by the other. Miss Fleming was a frequent visitor at the Fountains. She was an orphan and poor ; but popular rumour proclaimed her as at least the presumptive heiress of all that Lady Livingston had to bequeath ; of Heavitree Hall in Warwickshire, with all the fat acres that belonged to it ; and of the ready-money standing to the dowager's credit in consols, a fortune which report estimated at a clear ten thousand a year. Six or seven thousand of annual revenue would have been nearer the mark ; but even that was well worth the having. Lady Livingston had more, but then she had her life-interest in the larger portion of the late peer's property, and had she been of a saving nature, would, no doubt, have been a very much richer testatrix than she was likely to prove. That Beatrice would be the future mistress of Heavitree Hall

was certainly probable, for the dowager had always shown a marked preference for her society, and there was a gentleness in her tone, when she addressed her, which the resolute old lady did not exhibit towards any living being save her.

“Raining again, is it not? and a fog creeping yonder by the edge of the shrubbery,” said Lady Livingston, breaking a silence that had lasted some minutes, and glancing upwards at the leaden sky. “In London, I should say, they must have the gas burning hours since, and scarcely be able to grope their way about the streets, even then. I wonder what this Miss Merton—Maybrook—this Canadian girl that is coming, will think of it all? Her first impressions of England will not be very pleasing ones, I suspect; and so much the better, for then she will not be disappointed. A governess, or companion, for it’s all the same, ought to be prepared to rough it.”



"I do not think she need be afraid of having to rough it very much with you, dear Lady Livingston," said Beatrice, laughing. She had never been afraid of the dowager, of whom so many stood in terror, but then she was secure in her own singleness of purpose. Over and over again had she been cautioned, when a child, to avoid giving offence to Lord Livingston's widow, who could make or mar the fortunes of the impoverished family to which she belonged; worldly counsels, to which she hearkened wonderingly, but which it would have been impossible to her to act upon in the spirit of the well-meant advice. Others of her kindred had humbled themselves to the dust before this autocrat in brocaded silk, and after years of flattery and scheming, had seen their castles in the air crumble to nothingness before the angry contempt of their patroness. Beatrice alone, who never schemed, who never flattered, who would

have far sooner become a seamstress or a shop-girl than have degraded herself by undue compliance or fulsome subservience, kept her place in the favour of the capricious old peeress.

“Won’t she? She ought to rough it. According to those Jacobin revolutionary newspaper men, who dictate, everything now, she ought to expect a bitter time of it. If I do not starve her and stint her, that is probably because I have plenty of money. Lady Margaret Screwby would do that. She need not mend the house-linen, run errands, or copy the tradespeople’s bills. I know a dozen women who insist that their companions’ duties include this,” rejoined Lady Livingston harshly, but with a twinkle in her eye, as if she spoke habitually as much in jest as in earnest. “And, for that matter, there are no limits to what can be exacted from the persons who are paid salaries instead of wages. There is a great deal in words, my dear.

My housemaids have, each of them, certain fires to light, certain work to do, and they would give notice if I tried to double their tasks. It is different with an educated drudge. I can't bully my servants who wear caps and aprons; but I can bully my governess, and I mean to do so if she does not suit my fancy."

"I don't think, Lady Livingston, that she has much to fear from you in that way," said Beatrice; "and I am nearly sure that you fancy you shall like her, or you would hardly have sent for her from such a distance."

"That shows how little you understand me," replied the elder lady, as she plied her needle. "I must have somebody with me. I cannot keep you, Beatrice, always in this old jail of a house, enduring this detestable climate, that is wearing away my lungs with its raw, damp chill, and with no amusement beyond a drive now and then to Hampton Court. I am hard to please,

perhaps, but at any rate I have not been pleased as yet, though I have made trial of a good many specimens of feminine perfection, whom my friends were so obliging as to send to me. Either they flattered me, or they were pert. I hate pert people, and I hate flatterers. Mrs. Philip Dashwood is a fool, no doubt, but she is a good woman, and this paragon of hers may have some real merits. I am glad she does come from Canada; that gives her a chance of not resembling those who preceded her here. They were all alike, the rest, as if they had been made by machinery. Either it was 'Yes, my lady,' or 'No, my lady,' to everything I happened to say; or else they proved their independence by contradicting an old woman of thrice their age and ten times their experience. If Miss—what do you call her?—Maybrook deserves half the good that Mrs. Dashwood writes of her, she may stay, and welcome, as long as I stay. That won't

be very long, perhaps. Doublefee was tormenting me, yesterday, to go to Algiers or Malaga. I suppose he's tired, selfish old time-server as he is, of trotting down to Richmond to feel my pulse, and yet he dares not throw me over, as Sterling did. Sterling is a ruffian, but he is a good doctor. Sir Joseph is a charlatan; but he was not far wrong in recommending a warm climate, and I would go to-morrow, only that those foreign places are odious—no fires to warm one, no food to eat, no doors and windows that close properly, no newspapers, not even a decent undertaker. No; Sir Joseph shall not get rid of me quite so easily. If die I must, the Fountains will do well enough to die in."

There are people who dread death, and abhor the mention of it, as the old Greeks did, yet whose minds are seldom free from the haunting shadow that must one day overtake them. There are others who talk freely and habitually of the King of Ter-

rors, but who in their secret hearts, feel no immediate apprehension of his grim presence. Lady Livingston belonged to the latter class.

And now came the sound of wheels, and the quick clang of the gate-bell ; and after a brief interval of time, the old butler, to whom surely must have descended the Shoes of Silence once worn by giant-killing Jack, so noiseless was his foot-fall, ushered in " Miss Maybrook."

" How do you do, my dear ?" said the dowager, half-rising from her seat, and extending two of her bejewelled fingers, in sign of welcome, to the new-comer. " I am glad to see you, and I dare say you are not sorry to be at your journey's end. By-the-by"—and as she spoke she adjusted her gold-rimmed glasses, and took a survey of Violet Maybrook, with as much coolness as if ~~she~~ had been contemplating some work of art—" I have *not* seen you yet.—Too pretty—very much too pretty for any-

thing!" The last words were muttered between the false teeth of the old peeress, and, as being presumably of the nature of a soliloquy, should have been, at least, conventionally inaudible to the subject of the remark. Lady Livingston, like many members of the Upper Ten Thousand who live habitually among their inferiors in worldly station, was accustomed to think aloud concerning the foibles of those dependent on her for bread or recommendation. To soliloquize is, in fact, so natural, that the discipline of social life can alone repress it. As matters stand, two orders of human beings indulge in those stage-whispers, which, if universal, would turn the everyday world of semblance and compromise, which we inhabit, into a bear-garden. These are recluses—the lonely student, the philosopher out of tune with his times—and the wealthy, whom circumstances have cut off from the wholesome bond of mutual dependence, which teaches most of

us to keep shoulder to shoulder in the world's march. The relict of Adolphus George Fitznorris, Baron Livingston, was more apt to utter comments on the conduct or appearance of those who served her, than she was herself aware of.

"Not, I hope, *for anything!*" echoed Violet, in that fearless tone that suited well with the steady gaze of her undaunted eyes, "My former employers have found me useful; and so will you, I trust, Lady Livingston, if you will give me a trial."

The noble mistress of the mansion arched her eyebrows for a moment, and then smiled graciously. "I shall like you, Miss Maybrook, I'm sure!" she said, motioning with her soft old hand to Violet to seat herself on the square sofa; "and I will try to make you like the Fountains—and me, too, if I can.—This is Miss Fleming, a relation of mine, who is good enough to spend a few weeks with a lonely old woman. By-the-by, another cousin of hers



and of my own—a sad fellow—has been in Canada these two years. Do you know Captain Dashwood ?”

“Sir Frederick Dashwood came over in the same ship with myself, the “Quebec,” answered Violet, without the slightest tremor in her voice ; “but, indeed, I knew him quite well when I lived with his aunt, Mrs. Dashwood, in Montreal.”

Women, from training and from instinct, are by far superior to men in the arts of concealment. On this occasion, Violet Maybrook’s mention of the man whose fate was in some mysterious manner linked with her own, was, as a piece of drawing-room diplomacy, simply perfect. There was no affectation of indifference, no sudden heightening of colour, no tell-tale quiver of the lip, nothing, in short, that could have revealed to even the most lynx-eyed observer the interest which the speaker took in him to whom her words referred. But she ran no risk of self-

betrayal, for Beatrice was neither inquisitive nor prone to suspicion; while the dowager was preoccupied by the thoughts which the mention of her kinsman had evoked.

"Yes, yes; Fred Dashwood has the title now, and the property, if there is any property," muttered the old lady, as she fixed her eyes upon the fire; "but he'll come to no good, you'll see. Some men never sow their wild oats. He has been flinging his about broadcast since he was a boy in a jacket, and a nice crop he will have to reap, presently. I don't believe Sir George left a sixpence behind him—all muddled away. Came over in the same ship, did he? It won't be long, then, before he finds his way here, especially if he suffers from his old complaint—empty pockets. I was fool enough to write him a cheque for—never mind what; I had better have put it into the poor-box at church—before he started for Canada."

As Lady Livingston rambled on thus, gazing on the burning coals, and forgetful of her auditors, Beatrice came across to speak a few kind commonplace words to the Canadian girl, whose solitary position in a country and household new to her might have proved the open sesame to a less gentle heart than that of Miss Fleming. Then the dowager's reverie came to an end, and she remembered that the newcomer was probably tired, and would, perhaps, like some tea before dinner, the hour of which was not very remote, and that the housekeeper, Mrs. Hart, had been busying herself with the preparation of Violet's room. "A south aspect, my dear, though I dare say, coming from the ice and snow out there, you don't care much about that. However, it is in the west wing, the warmest part of the house, and very near mine. I like to have some one near me."


"What do you think of her?" asked Lady Livingston, arousing herself from

what had seemed to be a doze, five minutes after Violet had been duly consigned to the care of Mrs. Hart, the housekeeper, as the dressing-bell sent its warning summons through the house.

“ I have seen so very little of her yet !” said Beatrice quietly ; and then, seeing that the dowager looked unsatisfied with this evasive reply, she added, slightly lowering her tone : “ I hardly know what I think. She is very pretty, and her voice is a pleasant one, and she seems to be naturally a lady ; but—don’t think me foolish, dearest Lady Livingston—I almost feel as if I were a little afraid of her. The feeling will wear off, I dare say.”

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PICTURE ON THE WALL.

INNER, at the Fountains, during the occupancy of that red-brick mansion by the Dowager Lady Livingston, pertained rather to the nature of a ceremony than of a repast. The old peeress, like most ladies, made luncheon her real dinner. But she was none the less resolved that the great meal of the day, for which, so far as food and wine were concerned, she cared nothing, should in nowise be shorn of its proper glory as the main-spring and central pivot of a well-regulated establishment. In defiance of London, and

its compliance with the rhythmical advice of the late Mr. Thomas Moore, to "steal a few hours from the night," she chose to adhere to antique maxims, and to dine at seven o'clock. Why not? The hour had been, when she—Susan Beatrice Livingston—was a young married woman, reckoned a culpably late one by the Nestors and Nestorias of an elder generation. She had herself, when a child, heard her mother relate how Mr. Fox had refused to dine at seven with the Duchess of Dorsetshire, because he was engaged to sup at six with the Bishop of Oxbridge. Mr. Fox was then but freshly laid to rest by the side of his rival in Westminster Abbey, and the memory of his rejoinder was fresh too. And Lady Livingston chose to dine at seven o'clock.

A grand, sad, spacious room was the dining-room of the Fountains, a room overlooked, after the fashion of the two centuries that preceded ours, by a gallery

railed in with balustrades covered with sprawling Cupids and tarnished gilding—a room where there were odd echoes and strange reverberations of sullen sound, as if the ghosts of dead revellers chimed in now and then with spectral laughter, or with hollow applause, at some toast or speech inaudible to mortals. Many a fine feast had been held there, doubtless, during the reign of the nabob who had returned from the East with his rupees and without his liver. It was in the thick of the fierce old French war that these banquets had begun. What bumpers of fiery sherry and heady port must have been quaffed there! what hip, hiping to the triumph of the British arms, and the overthrow of the Corsican usurper, must have awaked the sympathizing voices of that arched roof, painted all over with plump and multi-coloured mythology! How that fleshy Olympus must have trembled to the roaring after-dinner chants of Britons (in several waist-

coats) who never would be slaves, and to patriotic and bacchanalian refrains as punch completed what claret and champagne (smuggled in from the French enemy) had begun! And to fancy the founder of the feast sitting, yellow, lean, taciturn, a death's head, in the chief seat of his own table, wondering, perchance, when the loud mirth was at the highest, whether he had made the best bargain for himself and his own happiness, after all!

Since Lady Livingston had dwelt there, it needs hardly to be said that the great dining-room of the Fountains had witnessed no such frantic scenes of extravagant merry-making as had taken place under the rule of the first owner of the house. And the every-day dinner was almost as melancholy an affair as a funeral could have been. There was an exhibition of gold and silver plate on the sideboard such as had never glittered there in the nabob's time, for Lord Livingston's



well-endowed widow had for her life the use of the family shields and vases and epergnes and candelabra, to say nothing of ancient cups and tankards that wine and ale had mantled in before drinking-glasses grew common. The butler and his liveried subordinates went through the routine of their duties with praiseworthy and noiseless solemnity. But there were hardly candles enough burning to illuminate the whole of the great room, and the conversation was apt to flag; and as for the dinner itself, no one seemed to care in the least for it. The whole scene had an air of hollow unreality, as if it had been the mere presentment of some mimic banquet on the stage of a theatre.

In the midst of these almost funereal splendours Violet Maybrook bore herself gracefully and well, so that her titled employer, who kept furtive watch for some sign of the deficient breeding which, in her mind, was inseparably connected with

humble birth and a dependent position, gradually came round to the belief that Beatrice had been right after all, and that Violet was naturally a lady. The girl's manner, she admitted to herself, was perfection. There was no servile eagerness to please, no uneasy self-assertion, while what little Violet did say, was well expressed and in good taste. The very servants, severe critics, like all their tribe, had a good word to say for the young lady from Canada when they discoursed concerning her in the basement ; and the old coachman who had brought her from the railway station spoke of her as a "thoroughbred 'un ;" the loftiest commendation which he could have found it in his heart to bestow upon even a duchess. The good impression which the new companion had made seemed to grow deeper as the evening progressed. She talked but little, yet Beatrice Fleming listened with an interest which surprised herself to what she said of

colonial life and habits, the climate and the people of that strange northern land whence she came. At Lady Livingston's request she took her place at the piano, and played and sang more than once. Her voice was rich and flexible, but the chief charm of her singing was the exquisite skill with which her tones were modulated so as to express the feelings that tallied with the words upon her lips.

"That is very good: you must have had good masters, indeed, my dear," said the dowager, who had been gifted by nature with a finer ear and a more correct musical taste than were often to be met with. "I should really like to know whether it was an Italian or a German who taught you?"

"Neither, Lady Livingston," answered Violet, smiling; "I was taught by a neighbour of ours, a Montreal girl like myself, a very good musician, and whose fine voice, if you could but once hear it

would make you think very poorly of mine. It was a treat to hear her sing."

"And her name?" asked the dowager, with that aimless curiosity which the aged often exhibit.

Violet Maybrook's brow darkened for a moment, as if some painful thought had crossed her mind. "Her name," she said, gravely, "was Miss Larpent."

"I like her," said Lady Livingston, speaking decisively, as if she were the forewoman of a feminine jury delivering a verdict on Violet Maybrook, as she lingered with her favourite young kinswoman in the yellow drawing-room after the new member of the household had retired to rest—"I like her, and I shall keep her. It is not her fault if she is so pretty, after all; and I am sure she is too sensible not to remember that she has to earn her own living. If she were anybody's daughter, she would be brought out, of course, and make a sensation in London, I

should say. As it is, she will make a capital companion for me ; and if she plays her cards properly, who knows if she may not be decently provided for some day. There's Chasuble the curate ; his wife was a governess in Lady Blunderbore's family, and the engagement lasted six years, till his aunt died. I don't see why Miss Maybrook should not have as good luck, if all goes well."

While Lady Livingston was engaged in predicting this qualified amount of good fortune for her dependent, the subject of her ladyship's discourse was moving restlessly to and fro in her own chamber, like some beautiful wild animal, caged, and raging against confinement. The mask had dropped, now that she was alone, from her fair face, and she was as one transfigured, so quickly had the frost of conventional self-restraint thawed before the influence of the hidden fires beneath the smooth surface. She, who had so lately

ordered every movement of her person, every intonation of her voice, so as to win the approbation of her noble employer, now paced the room with the lithe tread of a panther, her head held high, her hand extended, yet all unconscious of the angry gestures that an actress would have been glad to copy as the theatrical manifestation of her mock wrath and counterfeit defiance. There was nothing mock, nothing counterfeit, in the passionate energy with which Violet Maybrook communed with herself.

“And I must bear this—bear it for months, perhaps—and it will only be said that the penniless girl from Canada was lucky in finding food and shelter on such easy terms as those of falling in with the whims of a wealthy old woman. Did I not despise myself as I—I, Violet Maybrook—studied every turn of my head, weighed every syllable that I uttered, watched, as the seaman watches when the

breakers are white upon the reef, lest I should offend against the unwritten code that is as a religion to such persons as yonder titled mistress of mine. I have passed the inspection fairly well, as I should say, and my poor accomplishments have earned the meed of praise that is appropriate to those of a hired subordinate ; and, for the rest, her ladyship is satisfied that the young woman from Canada knows her position without need of preliminary lectures. Yes, I shall read to my lady, and pick up dropped stitches in my lady's Berlin wool-work, and find keys and spectacles that are mislaid, write letters, rate servants, and go through the whole dreary round of duties—I, who have done so much, dared so much, and am no nearer to my destined goal than this !”

She flung up her arm as she spoke, and her fingers contracted as though they had closed upon a dagger-hilt, and for a moment stood still like a statue, fiercely beautiful as

Medea's self. Then some new thought seemed to force itself upon her, and as she resumed her eager pacing to and fro, her thoughts again found unbidden utterance.

"It is not that I think it shame to work," she said, hurriedly, as if pleading her own cause before some viewless tribunal, "or that I shrink from earning the bread I eat. How happy I have been, before this, in some quiet farm-house in a far-off clearing of the forest, where the goodwife expected me to take my share of the daily toil, as her own daughters did, and where young and old gathered as equals around the evening fire, and all were valued according to what they were, not by the old-world standard of what they had! And yet—and yet I knew in my own heart that I was unfit to pass my life with those simple folks in their snow-white Norman caps and yellow coifs, and with their quaint old songs and proverbs, brought by their ancestry from a long dead France, and that my hopes and



dreams lay in Europe—in the great, rich, wonderful world east of the Atlantic—lottery though I knew it to be, where the prizes were few and the blanks many; and it seemed at last as if I had gained my pass-key that should admit me to try my fortune among the millions that crowd and jostle one another at the grand game of life.”

She took a turn or two in the room, speechlessly, and then paused in her walk, and leant against the corner of the massive chimney-piece, with her eyes bent upon the ground, “Selfish, cowardly, base, cruel”—such the words that dropped one by one from her lips: “all this I knew him to be, this man for whom I have sold my soul, and yet—woe is me, and bitter as is the truth, I love him—love him still! Can love and contempt go hand in hand? I know, to my cost, that they can.”

Her hand as she spoke fell listlessly by her side, and a look of depression and sad-

ness came over her bright face, like the sudden darkening of a tropic sky when the sun has plunged into the western sea.

“I have schemed for him, laboured for him, had no hope, no dream,” she murmured faintly, “that did not link his triumph with my own ; yet he would play me false, and fling me off, as no longer necessary to his ambition. I read the treason in his eyes, I hear it in his voice ; every word betrays it ; yet he fears me, and dares not openly to tell me that his caprice is over, and that he cares for me no more. I would be his true wife, more helpful, and more ready to guide and warn and guard, more faithful and more fond than ever woman was. And he has no heart to feel this, no intellect to comprehend that with me by his side he might rise to be what without me he could never attain to : could be really great, powerful, prosperous. His coarse fancy can but grovel in the mire where gold can be grasped by the unscrupulous.”

pulous, and he would sell himself to-morrow for money. And this doll—this Beatrice Fleming—first favourite, as I should guess, with yonder beldam of quality—his cousin, forsooth—will doubtless inherit very much money. I remember how guardedly, with what feigned indifference, he mentioned her name ; but it is difficult to blind eyes sharpened, as mine have been, by bitter and hard experience. If he dared—— But beware ! Sir Frederick Dashwood—beware how you play fast and loose with me !”

And as she uttered these last words all signs of lassitude or despondency passed away, and she stood erect, with a royal scorn imprinted in every line and feature of her beautiful face, her eyes glowing, her clear-cut lips trembling with anger.

“ He does not dare,” she said, with a haughty confidence that well became her proud loveliness and the queen-like carriage of her head. “ Nay, more, I do believe

that, fickle and shallow that he is, he does care for me somewhat, though he loves money more. Lady Dashwood! The title is no very magnificent one, but it is fairly mine, and none, if they are wise, will try to cheat me out of my rightful reward for—— Heavens, how came that here!”

And in a moment Violet's face became as pale as sculptured marble, and she reeled, and caught at a table near her for support, as with dilated eyes and set features she gazed at a picture on the wall before her, and on which her glance now rested for the first time. The fabled terrors of the Gorgon's head could hardly have produced a greater effect than this, for the girl's very breathing was hushed as, with white lips parted and motionless limbs, she contemplated the object on which her eyes had suddenly fallen. It was one of those oval paintings technically known as pastels, more common in France than in England, and mounted in a hand-

some frame, the gilding of which was beginning to grow dull. It was merely the portrait of a child—of a pretty tiny boy with golden hair, and blue eyes full of mirth and trust, and the soft, peach-like cheek of happy healthy infancy. But at the sight of it Violet Maybrook seemed, for a short time, as though she had been abruptly transformed into stone, so ghastly was the face which she turned towards the portrait.

For a short time only. Presently, the haggard look of anguish passed away, and rising up from the crouching attitude in which she had till then remained, she approached the picture, and coldly inspected it, without any further sign of repugnance or agitation.

“A pretty sketch,” she said, critically. “French, by the style, and the artist’s monograph in the corner. I wonder what the original—marquis, banker, or advocate—looks like by this time. I should be


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paying the picture too great a compliment to turn it to the wall."

And with a low laugh she turned away, and methodically completed her preparations for retiring to sleep. The mask was on again now, and Violet Maybrook, although alone, was once more the quiet and decorous companion of the Dowager Lady Livingston.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE GARDEN.

HE morrow that succeeded Violet's arrival at the Fountains was one of those golden days of mellow glory which, in our variable English climate, sometimes occur, like oases of fine weather interspersed amid the desert of wintry gloom. So it was on this occasion. The noisome fog had rolled away, the sullen canopy of clouds had disappeared, the yellow sunbeams shone resplendent through the pure blue of the sky, and the breeze was soft as the caressing touch of some loving hand unseen. The birds sang

among the half-stripped boughs, where yet the russet leaves clung to the parent branch, as if new hope had sprung up amongst them, and winter's dreaded march been checked for yet awhile. The earth cast off, as it were, the garments of sorrow, and decked herself bravely once more, no longer, as in spring and jovial summer, flaunting the insolent loveliness of sanguine youth, but rather assuming the matured beauty of a fair and noble woman, such as smiles upon us yet from the painted canvas of great masters of the brush—long dead.

Lady Livingston was far from indulging in meditations such as these. She saw, however, that the day was remarkably fine, and one on which an invalid might take exercise without fear of bronchial Nemesis ; wherefore, she ordered her carriage at the early hour of two, and declared her intention of taking Violet with her to Hampton Court. Were there not, besides the peach-cheeked maids of honour, whose portraits



preserved the memory of Charles II.'s witty, wicked times, other curiosities there in the shape of certain ancient gentlewomen, dignified pensioners of royalty, with whom the mistress of the Fountains had kept up her acquaintance with a scrupulous politeness that was surely disinterested? For no one could hope to derive advantage, in a worldly sense, from communion with Mrs. General Buckram, Lady Lucy Spindrifft, or the Honourable Elizabeth Trenchard, all of whom were needy, elderly, and not inclined to take too lenient a view of a world that had done no better for them than to bring them to this common refuge for their old age. Fortune had dealt more kindly with the dowager; nor had she ever forgotten the day when pretty, lively Bessie Trenchard and laughing Lucy Spindrifft had danced their first quadrille in her house in Mayfair Square. She was herself a bride then, and Belgravia a swamp as yet uninvaded by Fashion. She

well remembered to have been present at Mrs. Buckram's wedding, oddly as the idea of orange flowers and a veil of Brussels lace contrasted with the personal appearance of the general's relict as she now was. So she made these dissatisfied waifs and strays of aristocracy welcome whenever there was feasting at the Fountains; and she lent them a ten-pound note sometimes when livery-stable keepers grew rude, or milliners importunate; and partook of their hospitality as well, so far as a cup of weak tea and an hour's gossip went, some dozen times in the twelvemonth. This was to be one of those red-letter days in the limited calendar of the ladies who led an unexciting life at Hampton Court. It was pleasant for these decayed persons of quality when they could insert in the closely-written letters which their fluent pens were always scratching off to friends at a distance: "Dear old Lady Livingston was here all the morning;" or, "The dear

old dowager from the Fountains was saying, only yesterday." For, in very truth, such visits from the outer world were rare, the young and vigorous members of the distinguished stocks from which these dames and damsels sprang being somewhat forgetful of the withered blossoms living on the memory of the past. The present Earl of Spindrift would as soon have sat through a tragedy or a sermon as have endured the martyrdom of his aunt's conversation. Lord Platterborough, his wife, and his daughters, troubled their heads very little about "poor Elizabeth at Hampton." The card of Her Grace the Duchess of Snowdon always found its way to the top of the china-bowl in which Mrs. General Buckram kept the pasteboard reminders of her friends, although the ducal call had been paid four mortal seasons since.

There was very little doubt but that Lady Livingston would be cordially re-

ceived by her contemporaries at Hampton Court, and none the less so that she would bring with her so beautiful a novelty as the girl from Canada, of whose faultless bearing the old peeress was secretly proud. But Beatrice put in a little plea for the dowager's early return, only to be met by a decided negative.

“Nonsense, my love. No; the day is a great deal too fine for me to give up a bit of it; and, I should not wonder, unless I am too tired, if we went on to Bushey afterwards.—Oswald Charlton coming, eh? Pooh, my dear, I don't believe a word of it; not I. Young men never do what they promise to do—not in that way, I mean—and I dare say he has forgotten all about the note he wrote from Scotland, and will not show himself at the Fountains this month or more; if he does, you must manage to amuse him until I do get back, and tell him I insist on his staying to dinner. Tradgett” [Tradgett was the butler,

shod with the Shoes of Silence] "will find him some of that yellow-sealed wine of my lord's, if there is any left ; and we must do our best to keep him from being bored, that's all."

Lady Livingston, who could be conveniently blind on occasion, took no notice of the fact, that at the mention of Oswald Charlton's name, Beatrice first blushed, and then grew pale, and busied herself with exceeding devotion in collecting the furs and foot-warmers, the shawls and cloaks, without which the dowager would as soon have thought of setting forth for an airing in her carriage as would a Newfoundland fisherman put to sea without an ample provision of deep-sea line, cod-hooks, and mussel-bait. Her ladyship's prophecy regarding the forgetfulness of young men was, as events proved, signally falsified ; for the yellow chariot with its coroneted panels and its fat gray horses had not rolled very far on the road that leads

to Hampton Court, before the bell at the lodge-gate awoke the echoes with its metallic tongue, and "Mr. Charlton" was announced.

"So my aunt has gone out," said the visitor, cheerfully resigned under the temporary privation of that aged relative's company. "Well, she would never find a better day for a drive the year through. I can only hope that you will not get tired of my society, Miss Fleming, before she returns."

Beatrice looked shyly up at him. She had noticed—women are very quick to notice such things—that the young man's manner was not quite such as was usual with him. He seemed anxious, restless even, as if there were some weight upon his mind; less at his ease, too, than she ever remembered to have seen him, and since he was often at the Fountains, she and he had often met.

A fine young fellow, with his bright

truthful eyes, and dark hair tossed back from a broad forehead, and well-shaped mouth, kindly and resolute withal as to its expression, was the visitor. He was some three years younger than Sir Frederick Dashwood, not quite so tall, not quite so handsome ; but indeed it was difficult to institute a comparison between the two men, so utterly unlike were they. Dashing Dashwood had through life been one of those spoiled favourites of fortune who unite the fatal beauty of the tiger to some of the worst qualities of the feline race. Woe be to those who loved or trusted him, won by the magic of a fair face, or the charm of a voice that seldom spoke but to deceive ! But Oswald Charlton's countenance was one which inspired confidence and liking even in the worldly wise ; and his was a name never mentioned among men otherwise than with respect, a respect which rank and riches, even when coupled with blameless behaviour, fail to elicit. The

Duke of Snowdon, for instance, was a great patrician, a model husband and father, regularly in his pew at church as in his place in parliament, a chairman of quarter-sessions, and a man whose doings might have been chronicled by a town-crier without offence being given to the censorious—yet men did not scruple to describe His Grace as a well-meaning old fool ; while they pronounced Charlton a clever fellow, sure to make his way in the world, yet honest as the day. He had the good opinion of Lady Livingston, in whose favour he stood second only to Beatrice Fleming. Although he called her aunt, however, he was no relation of hers by blood. He was a nephew of the late Lord Livingston ; and as regarded his actual position in life he was simply a barrister, with a small professional income and slender private means—less than five hundred a year, when all was reckoned.

This modest revenue was in itself a proof



that Mr. Charlton was not what is popularly called a rising barrister. Members of the bar rarely get credited with the faculty of ascending until they have mounted a good many rungs of the forensic ladder, and are visible above the bewigged heads of their rivals. And then attorneys are an incredulous generation, slow to detect untried talent, and with a preference for the counsel learned in the law, who were gaining verdicts and terrifying witnesses, while they, the attorneys, were still but in the embryo condition of articulated clerks. They like, too, the comic men of the circuit, facetious fellows who can extract the maximum of fun from the sentimental letters in a breach-of-promise case, red-faced, loud of voice, truculent in cross-examining, yet not too proud to study the tastes and defer to the opinion of a solicitor with briefs to bestow. Oswald Charlton trod none of these paths to success. What work was entrusted to him

he did well, and in a manner that won the approbation of veterans in the profession ; but for every guinea he received, a perfect shower of retainers and refreshers fell on Serjeant Browbeat, on Botherham, Q.C., and other luminaries whose names were constantly before the public, yet who were glad to take their law at a second-hand, in consultation from Oswald, junior in the cause. He did not lecture, had never even tried to get into Parliament ; but still he was regarded as one who might one day get steadily into political and professional harness, and so come to be rich and famous, a probable judge, a possible Attorney-General.

There was one person, however, who augured ill of Oswald's future prospects, and this was no other than his own father. Mrs. Charlton was long since dead. She had been a half-sister of the late Lord Livingston, and it was her slender income which her son had inherited, and which

had enabled him to subsist in London whilst reading for the bar. He had neither present allowance nor ultimate expectations from his surviving parent, who, nevertheless, should have been fairly rich in the world's goods, uniting as he did the proceeds of his own fat living of Dullingham to those of his canonry of Slochester. But Dr. Charlton, rector and canon, had married again, and had five daughters for whom to provide by keeping up the policies of life-assurance, at which he grumbled as horse-keep and old port grew dearer, and had nothing to spare for the offspring of his first marriage. He and his second wife liked Oswald with that languid liking that is often entertained, in the best-regulated families, for relatives seldom seen, and who make no inconvenient demands on purse or patience. But this tepid affection was no bar to the rector's habit of indulging in gloomy prognostications as to his son's future.

“A little too clever,” he would say, blinking at the beeswing in the ruby-tinted glass that he held between his half-shut eyes and the light that streamed through the French windows of his spacious dining-room ; “and a great deal too fond of crotchets. A young man ought to choose his groove, and stick to it ; whereas, if Oswald were in the House, he would insist on his independence, which means sitting below the gangway, voting wildly, making speeches that annoy everybody in office or about to be in office, and getting for himself the hearty dislike of Opposition and Government. It’s just the same with his law business—didn’t he say, before half the county, at old Sir Robert’s, that if he were convinced his client’s case was an unjust one, he would throw up the brief at once ? No good ever yet came of being too particular, so far as my experience goes. He has but one chance—to marry well, and he is much more likely to fall in love with

some parson's daughter" (the doctor's lines had fallen in such pleasant places that he sometimes forgot that he was himself in orders), "and find himself at forty-five a struggling, disappointed man, with a small practice, and an increasing butcher's bill."

Such, then, was Oswald Charlton, as viewed by his friends and by his father. And here, at the Fountains, was the actual Oswald in the flesh, strangely pre-occupied, and so ill at ease, that observant Beatrice took courage as she remarked his embarrassment.

"I have strict injunctions to provide for your amusement until Lady Livingston returns," she said almost archly; "for, indeed, I believe she was afraid you would run back to London without waiting for her. Will you walk through the grounds? It really seems wrong to stay indoors on such a day as this, and the paths are quite dry again in spite of all the rain that has fallen lately."

“I should like to go round the old place; that is, if you will be kind enough to bear me company,” replied Oswald Charlton, and Beatrice went straightway in quest of her outdoor attire. The pretty hat and velvet jacket became her wonderfully well, so Oswald thought, as together they trod the glistening gravel of the garden walks, among the evergreen clumps and smooth-shaven lawns, and the beds where a few sober autumnal flowers did duty for the by-gone blaze of the summer flora, and the fantastically trimmed and clipped trees, which dated from a period when art strove to improve upon nature. “So my aunt has set the fountains playing again, in defiance of frost and the almanac,” said the young barrister, as the liquid sound of splashing water fell musically on his ear. “Yes, there they are. I see Neptune and all his court, nymphs and tritons, dolphins broken in for saddle and harness, urns, trumpets, tridents, shells, and chariots, busy

in sending up the tinkling spray as of old. How the drops glitter, jewel-like, in the sunlight! I never knew these classical personages to be at work in winter before."

"I think Lady Livingston wished Miss Maybrook—that is her new companion, from Canada, whom I suppose she mentioned as being expected when she wrote to you, Mr. Charlton," said Beatrice,—“to see the fountains playing. I don't suppose they impressed her much, though, after Niagara."

"I am sure I do not know why they should not," returned Oswald, smiling; "just as old Father Thames yonder, with his silvery stream and green eyots, is worth notice, though the Rhine and the Danube may run wider and deeper than he does. Shall we stroll along the terrace, Miss Fleming? It was always a favourite spot with me, and I think the view from it is the very prettiest on this part of the river."

"You stayed till late in the north this

year," said Beatrice, as they paced side by side along the terrace in question, overlooking the Thames, not then, as in summer, gay with pleasure-boats and busy with snorting steam-yachts. There was a barge or two to represent traffic; and on the banks a few patient anglers were trolling for the pike that persisted in not being "on the feed;" but that was all, with the exception of a four-oared boat with its crew of zealous amateurs, practising with well-meant earnestness under the superintendence of their bawling cockswain. "What did you find to do in Scotland after the grouse-shooting?"

"Killing blue hares among the hills," answered Oswald, promptly. "At least," he added, after a pause, "such was supposed to be my all-engrossing occupation when in Cateranshire; but the truth is, that the keen air and the wild scenery tempted me much more than the wanton slaughter of some unlucky ruminants, that had the



bad fortune to be chased up the rocky pass in droves, live targets that died to make a Highland holiday. I know that, for my own part, I was often lost in day-dreams among the mountains, and earned the contempt of lairds and gillies by the scantiness of my contribution to the 'bag' of the party. Perhaps you will let me tell you of what I was dreaming?"

These last words were spoken with a significance which made the fluttering colour mount in a moment to Beatrice's fair cheek. Hitherto she had derived confidence from the visitor's unusual awkwardness, but now she almost feared that the tables were to be turned upon her. It was not the first time that she had found herself alone with Oswald; but now, she scarcely knew why, she felt as if she could have given much to have brought about the immediate return of Lady Livingston. Still she could not remain silent, so she rejoined: "Perhaps I can guess what it was.

You were thinking of your chambers and briefs, and all the speeches you would make when you got back to the courts again. Lady Livingston always says you are sure to be Lord Chancellor, some day."

"Every man at the bar would be a caliph, or chancellor for a day," replied Oswald Charlton, "if his aunts and cousins and grandmother had a voice in the matter. But seriously, and leaving the wool-sack—the thirty thousand pound prize in the lottery—alone for the moment, as metal too hot and too heavy for ordinary handling, I *was* filled with Alnaschar projects and ambitious thoughts—dashed with a little self-reproach, perhaps, Miss Fleming, for wasted time and opportunities neglected. That I could rise in my profession, I believe; that I might attain to high success is, I think, possible; but then I want, as many a man has wanted, something to work for—some one who would rejoice at each step gained on the toilsome ladder

that leads to fame and fortune—some one who would cheer me if I grew weary or faint-hearted by the way—some one, lastly, whose happiness would be dearer to me than my own, and for whose loved sake I could struggle on, eager to win honours, that I might deck her with the spoils of victory. Can you guess, Miss Fleming — Beatrice — why I have told this to you ?”

Beatrice bent her eyes upon the ground, and trembled, almost visibly. It was coming, then, that disclosure that she dreaded, that she was powerless to avert. She had known, or suspected for some time past, that Oswald's love was given to her ; but he had never told her so, had never asked her to be his, and therefore she could indulge in those sweet vague reveries that float through a girl's mind, too intangible to be grasped and bound by the hard rules of logic. It had been so pleasant to her to note his preference for

her society, to mark, by many a small sign that she was not indifferent to him, and to close her ears and eyes to the stern, imperative necessity which to her thinking must always keep him and her apart. That was all over now. She could not doubt that he was about to ask for her hand in marriage. Of her own answer, of the answer which she must give, she had no doubts at all. And then—and then perhaps he would be very angry with her, and go away, to come no more, and so learn, it might be, to forget her. And she wished for a ready wit to avert the coming scene, and tried to speak once and again, and broke down hopelessly, and so stood silent, to listen to him.

“ You are not offended that I should call you Beatrice ?” said the young man, and as he spoke he took her hand. “ We have known each other for a long time, and we are almost relations, you know ; but it is not that which emboldens me to take such a

liberty. I am blunt of speech, and must go straight to my point in a case where my heart is concerned. When I spoke of some one whom I longed for to be always with me, the sharer of my joys and sorrows, of my triumphs, if triumphs come, of one for whom I could really put forth all my strength, that I might be owned by men to be worthy of such a treasure, I was thinking, dearest, of you ! I love you, Beatrice, darling, love you very dearly and truly. Will you try to love me, and be the crowning blessing of my life ? Speak, my love !”

She was trembling very much by this time, insomuch that when his arm stole round her slender waist, the proceeding seemed really needful to give her support. She bent down her head, weeping, on his strong shoulder as he bent over her. “ Oh, no, no !” was all she said, through the sobs that now came thick and fast. It would be necessary to be a woman fully to appreciate all the delicious misery, the

sweet pangs, that thrilled through Beatrice as she harkened to her lover's voice, and felt the tender touch of his caressing hand. Now she knew, really knew, on the evidence of his own words and tones, how he loved her. Her gladness and her pride that he should love her so much and so truly almost predominated over the bitter sense that all this was in vain, and that when she spoke, it must be to return an answer that should dash his hopes for ever to the ground.

He mistook the character of her emotion, and drew her the closer to him.

"You will be mine, dear Beatrice," he said gently, "my very own, dearer than all the world besides, my darling wife!"

And he stooped to press his lips to her cheek, but she averted her head, still sobbing as though her heart would break.

"If I have been too sudden, too rough ———" he began ; but Beatrice interrupted him.

“No, no; it is not that!” she said in broken accents, but with an energy that under the circumstances would have surprised herself: “it is my fault, all mine. I should not have allowed—that is, I should have guarded against—against this that has come to pass; but I was so surprised and—and so foolish—Mr. Charlton, your good opinion of me is a great compliment, but I must try to deserve it, even at the risk of losing it. I am not free to give you the answer that you desire—not free to be your wife. I—I——”

And now it was her turn to break down. Oswald's brow grew very dark, and his smile vanished. “I was not aware,” he said coldly, “that I was a trespasser here, asking for what was already plighted to another. I knew how I had garnered you in my heart; I was vain enough to believe that you were predisposed in my favour; or, at the least, fancy-free. My error has

proved a painful one to both of us. I certainly did not think, when I poured my innermost thoughts into your ear, Miss Fleming, that you would meet me with the stereotyped reply of engaged affections."

"Nor do I now," exclaimed Beatrice, hiding her face with her slender fingers, through which the tears welled fast. "I should be much, much to blame if I had permitted you to address me as you did just now, if my feelings were not—— But what am I saying? Oh! Mr. Charlton, you are a man, and in your strength should be merciful to a weak girl like myself. Let me go, let me go back to the house! It is not fair, it is not generous to press me further on a subject which, as you cannot fail to see, distresses me as this does."

"Excuse me, Miss Fleming," returned Oswald, knitting his brows, and speaking in a firm, almost harsh tone, "if I take the liberty of differing from you for once. A



man who asks a woman to be the crown and glory of his life, earns at least the right to an explicit answer. I have not had one as yet, and your words are an enigma to me. I hope I am not a conceited coxcomb if I say that they implied no personal repugnance to myself. Still more sure am I that they do not convey the meaning, which would indeed be a death-blow to my hopes, that your heart is given elsewhere. You are not, you say, free to be my wife. I am, I know, a poor man, and of course——”

“You wrong me by the suggestion,” said Beatrice indignantly, as she drew back a pace from where he stood : “poverty would not repel, riches would not attract me, in such a case as this. But I do not belong to myself, and this poor hand of mine was placed, long ago, by that of one now dead—of my mother, in that of my cousin, Dashwood, as I promised——” She paused, weeping.

“Dashwood! Surely not your cousin


whom I have met at Lady Livingston's—not Captain Dashwood—Sir Frederick, as they call him now?" cried Oswald, eagerly. "I know the man to be utterly worthless, false and bad, gambler, profligate, vile misleader of youth as he is. Who could have had the cruelty to——"

"It was my mother's dearest wish that I should marry him," answered Beatrice simply; "and on her death-bed she joined our hands, and made me repeat the words of a solemn vow, of a pledge that binds me doubly, since it was she who exacted it, whose pale lips uttered the promise which I repeated. I was very young, and—and had I been older and less timid, I might have refused the oath, which now I dare not break.—Hark! I hear the carriage and the gate-bell. Let me go. You have wrung from me, Mr. Charlton, what I have hitherto kept a secret, even from my dear friend and benefactress yonder. Suffice it that I cannot listen to your suit—I am

Frederick's, if he comes to claim me. Now, let me go ; and pray—pray, let this be the last time that this folly is mentioned between us. We can be friends, but nothing more.”

## CHAPTER VI.

CONTAINS AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

ADY Livingston, in spite of the beauty of the day, of the agreeable conversation of Mrs. General Buckram, and of her own intention that Mr. Charlton and Miss Fleming should have some space for talking together undisturbed by the presence of a third person, had not remained from home very long. The worthy old lady had somewhat of the matchmaking instinct, which is so deeply implanted in the feminine bosom, and, like many exemplary chaperons, she felt loath to permit her

charge more than short periods of liberty to manage her own affairs. Many a man-œuvring mother nips inchoate proposals in the bud, and scares away sons-in-law the most eligible, from a sheer inability to understand that the young people can get on exceedingly well without the aid of her vast experience and practised tact. It was certainly the dowager's wish that Oswald and Beatrice should become engaged lovers, but it may be doubted if she would not have preferred to put off the happy termination of a courtship over the commencement of which she had benignly watched, rather than have had no ostensible finger in the pie matrimonial. Wherefore, she made haste back to the Fountains, and was somewhat chagrined to find that Beatrice had hurried up to her own room at the very instant of her arrival, and that Oswald Charlton was slowly walking up the broad path, bordered by tall hedges of clipped yew, that led to the house, with

an air of angry dejection that boded no good.

“Can the silly little puss have refused him after all?” thought the dowager, as she sent a servant to notify her return to “Mr. Oswald,” as the immemorial servants had called the nephew of their late lord ever since the days of ponies and cricket-bats.

Oswald Charlton was sufficiently a man of the world to assume a tolerably serene aspect as he entered the presence of the dowager; but the old lady noted signs enough of mental perturbation to convince her that something was amiss.

“This is my young friend, Miss Maybrook, just arrived from Canada,” said Lady Livingston; and as the young barrister bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, he could not help owning to himself that he had very seldom beheld a beauty so perfect as that of this new addition to the household.

“This must have been your first visit,

Miss Maybrook, to Hampton Court, I should suppose?" he said, drawing near, to Violet, as the old lady tossed over the heap of letters that lay waiting for her. "You found it curious, did you not?"

"Yes; I was shown several curiosities," returned Violet, with a flash of her dark eyes, and in a tone that puzzled him: "portraits by Lely and Kneller, and Mrs. General Buckram, and a Lady Lucy somebody—all very unlike anything which I ever saw on the other side of the Atlantic."

She spoke in a low voice, so that Lady Livingston did not catch the words, or appreciate the sarcasm which, to Oswald's fancy, they appeared to convey. At another time, he might have taken some interest in the study of a nature differing from the various types with which he was familiar, but he was now in no mood for an analysis of character.

"Ah, Miss Maybrook," he said carelessly, "when you have seen something

more of us in the old country, I shall ask you to tell me your opinion of us all. You colonial fellow-subjects of ours have one immense advantage over the intelligent foreigner who usually takes notes among us prior to printing his impressions of perfidious Albion ; that is to say, you know the language and some of the traditions, and can see the weak side of our institutions from a nearer stand-point than is possible to a French or German traveller. I grant that poor Mrs. General is as much a work of art as the picture of——”

“ Pictures ! We had hardly time to do justice to the pictures, and must wait for another fine day, if we are lucky enough to have one before the spring sets in, to go through the gallery more regularly. But some of my friends were at home, and they were delighted to see Miss Maybrook, and I think I may say that the pleasure was mutual,” said the dowager, who had now finished the inspection of her corre-



spondence. "It might make you vain, young lady, if I repeated what Mrs. Buckram whispered to me on the landing-place as we went away ; and I can tell you that praise from Sophia Buckram—I remember her as Sophy Whipstock, in her father, old Sir John's, time—is worth having. The king used to say—George IV., my dear, so you see my memory goes a long way back—that she was plain enough, but deserved a pension as a pattern of good breeding, and the best drilled young woman in all the Mayfair battalion. We will have some music, Oswald, after dinner, and——"

"I am afraid I cannot stay to dine to-day," said Oswald Charlton hurriedly. "I will come again very soon, aunt, to see you, but I must get back to chambers as quickly as I can. I have been idle for a long time, you see, while in the north, and there are papers waiting for me which I ought not to neglect. There is a train in twenty minutes," he added, glancing at the old

ormolu clock on the chimney-piece, "and I shall scarcely catch it, unless I am very brief in my leave-taking."

All this was said with some hesitation and awkwardness. Violet was as incapable as the old dowager herself of being hoodwinked by so transparent a pretext as this sudden devotion to business ; and by the covert smile that lurked about the corners of her well-shaped mouth, it was evident that she divined pretty clearly the real motive of Oswald's abrupt departure. Lady Livingston's tone changed at once.

"May I ask you to go to your room for a time, Miss Maybrook ?" she said, almost tartly ; "I must have a word with Mr. Charlton before he leaves us."

And Violet obeyed.

"Now, nephew," said the dowager, taking a deliberate survey of the young barrister through her glasses, "I may as well tell you that you will never make your fortune at the bar if you cannot put

a better face upon a bad cause than you have done to-day. I don't in the least wonder that you look ashamed of yourself, when all you can offer as a reason for neglecting your best friends is a lame excuse about law-matters that cannot be kept waiting. No, no; I am too old to be so easily taken in. You and Beatrice have quarrelled, I suppose, like geese as you both are; and I want to know why, that is all, that I may bring you together again. Don't stare at me, dear boy, as if I were a fortune-telling gipsy, instead of an old woman who has only two people to care for in this world, and who does not intend, if she can help it, that they should spoil their own happiness by any absurd misunderstanding. How you look at me! Why, my dear Oswald, you boys and girls are like the ostrich, that thinks no one can see him because he thrusts his head into a hole. Do you fancy that I am in my dotage already, or that I am so much taken

up with my knitting-needles and my worsted frame and my gossip, that I cannot keep my eyes open to what goes on around me, or see that you love Beatrice, and that she likes you well enough to accept you if you will but give her an opportunity? You shake your head. Why, Oswald, what, in the name of mischief, is amiss?"

And now the dowager, who had been talking in the tone of comfortable self-complacency which the old often assume when chuckling over the fulfilment of their predictions, or claiming recognition for their superior sagacity, suddenly changed her voice to one of alarm.

"You cannot mean to tell me," she said, rising from her seat, "that you have asked Beatrice to be your wife, and that she has refused your offer? I can't believe it; I don't believe it. Speak to me, nephew, and let me know the truth, however bitter it may be."

"Dear Lady Livingston," said Oswald,

drawing his chair nearer to the old lady's sofa, "I am sorry you have been so keensighted ; sorry, too, that you should be in some sense a sharer in the disappointment which I cannot deny that I feel. I never doubted your affection for me, but I was unaware that you knew my affections to be given to one whom you love deservedly still better than you do me. I may admit that you have guessed aright. When I came here to-day, there was a struggle in my breast as to whether or no I should ask Miss Fleming to be my wife ; not, let me hasten to say, from any doubts as to the full sincerity of my own attachment, but simply because I shrank, perhaps foolishly, from urging her to marry one who had yet his way to make in the world, and who could have offered her for the first years but a poor home, and a life of comparative privation."

"How do you know that ?" demanded the old peeress, austerely. "Or how can

you tell what I might have done for Beatrice on her wedding-day? I have no one else to care for, except you two; and," she added, smiling, but with a wistful look, "Beatrice is my godchild, and it is not a fairy godmother only who is privileged to bestow gifts. If there is any difficulty that money can——"

"Dear Aunt Livingston," said Oswald, taking the dowager's wrinkled hand, and kissing it, "you are the same generous-minded friend that I have ever known you; but, believe me, money can do nothing here. And I hope you will not be offended with me when I tell you that I could not have borne to be indebted, even to you, for a maintenance. I must earn the bread I eat; and, after some hesitation, I decided that if Beatrice cared for me, we two should be none the worse for a few years of that struggling life which to people of fashion appears as downright destitution. I could not have given my

wife a carriage, of course ; and even the smallest boy in buttons would have been a retainer too costly for our modest household ; but I suspect it is possible for happiness to exist even in the absence of equipages and liveried servants."

Lady Livingston listened to this speech with a very dubious expression on her face, as if uncertain whether it was incumbent upon her to be affronted at such bluntness of speech, and so absolute a rejection of her proffered bounty. Benevolent despots—and rich old ladies, when not simply egotists, are often disposed to be arbitrary in their kindness—do not easily reconcile themselves to the wilful stubbornness, as they deem it, of those who decline to pursue the royal road to happiness in all docility. But after an effort which did credit to her ladyship's latent magnanimity, the better nature of the woman prevailed, and she made answer, almost playfully : " You were always a sad rebel, Oswald, and have

made me angry with you many a time when you were a schoolboy, and my lord too, for that matter; and the worst of it was, that you had a trick of being in the right, or nearly in the right, which vexes one the more when one gets over one's ill-humour. Perhaps, if I were a man, I might have felt much as you do; but never mind that. I want to know why Beatrice answered you with a 'No;' not because she was afraid of life and love in a cottage, I am sure?"

Oswald Charlton rose from his seat, and took one or two hasty strides towards the window, and there stood, drumming with his fingers on the glass. "That is a question, aunt, that I don't know whether I have the right to answer," he said hoarsely.

"She cannot care for any one else? I don't believe it," cried the dowager, energetically. "No; I would wager my life that she does love you, whatever she may



say about it. Have I not seen her colour change at the sound of your very name? Have I not heard the tones of her voice when she spoke to you, utterly unlike those in which she replied to the pretty speeches of those brainless, well-whiskered young dandies who dangled after her at my garden-parties last season? and do you think that I, who love Beatrice so dearly, am purblind enough not to know for whom she has a preference? Nonsense! I would not believe it, if she herself told me so."

"And yet she is engaged to be married—and yet she is the betrothed bride of another man!" answered Charlton, half-savagely, as he struck the floor with his heel; "of a man, too, no more worthy of such a wife as Beatrice, than if he wore the felon's garb that many a less pestilent scoundrel than himself has had to don. I ought to ask your pardon, Lady Livingston, for speaking thus of one who is akin

to you by blood, but I lose all patience and all self-restraint when I think that Beatrice—my pure, tender, delicate Beatrice, should be sacrificed to such a one as Captain—now, save the mark! Sir Frederick Dashwood!"

"Fred Dashwood!" repeated the old lady, her voice growing shrill with surprise and anger. "Impossible! The mistake must be yours, Oswald. She never could have told you, unless she is mad, indeed, that she loved her cousin Frederick."

"No; but that she was pledged to marry him, that she most assuredly did tell me, but an hour ago," replied Oswald Charlton, with a groan, and still turning away his face. "It was her mother, it seems, who extorted from her a solemn promise—an oath, sworn beside her death-bed—that she would give her hand to Frederick Dashwood whenever he should be pleased to claim it; and this claim she regards as absolutely binding upon her

conscience. She made no attempt to convince me that her heart inclined to him in the least ; nay, so far as I could judge, her feelings towards him rather savoured of dread and of repugnance, than of esteem. But she is the slave of her word, wrung from her as it was under such painful circumstances, and——”

“ I will not allow it. I will point out to her how wrong and preposterous it would be to adhere to such an engagement. I say, it shall not be,” said Lady Livingston, in a tone that might have suited Queen Elizabeth.

Oswald shook his head. “ Those gentle natures,” he said, in an accent of deep conviction, “ are often the hardest to turn from any course which is dictated by a sentiment—mistaken, very likely—of duty. You will not, believe me, prevail with Beatrice by any of the ordinary arguments or inducements which might have weight with others. She is of the stuff of which, in


other times than these, martyrs were made. Your displeasure, if you could find it in your heart to be incensed with her for even exaggerated notions of filial obedience, would give her very great pain, but I am sure that her resolution would remain unshaken. It has been tested, and it has come victoriously through the trial, for I may tell to you," he added, sadly, "that the innocent darling's unguarded words betrayed that she could have loved me, did love me, perhaps; yet she never wavered in her determination to yield up her own happiness at the wish of her dead parent. Oh, Lady Livingston, do, if you can, save her—not for me, or for my sake, but for her own—from being the wife of a man who would break her spirit first, and her heart afterwards!"

Then he went; and as he walked rapidly along, with his hat pulled down over his brows, on his way to the railway station, a sadder and a sterner expression than was

common with him sat upon his features. Once he stopped in his walk, clenching his hand as if to strike down some invisible enemy. Then, with a bitter laugh, he passed on. It was a gloomy evening at the Fountains. Beatrice, silent and pale, scarcely spoke; and Miss Violet Maybrook, narrowly observing her every action, drew her own deductions from the events of the day. Lady Livingston was in the worst possible temper, speaking curtly and snappishly when addressed, and at other times knitting her bushy eyebrows as though she pondered over some knotty and intricate problem. Long after others were asleep, the old lady sat over the glowing fire in her own room, thinking deeply. But the answer to the riddle seemed hard to find; and in her sleep she muttered uneasy words, which told that her fancy was busied yet with the fortunes of her young kinswoman.

## CHAPTER VII.

MESSRS. GOODEVE'S CLERK.

T was the third day since that bright and beautiful one that had shed its mellow beauty on the garden-terrace of the Fountains while Oswald Charlton vainly urged his suit to Beatrice Fleming, and lo! a mightier transformation scene had taken place than ever was contrived by the most public-spirited of theatrical managers. The weather had changed, suddenly and utterly, and the streets of London were clogged with snow. Snow, snow everywhere, though a countryman might have been pardoned if he had

failed to recognize in the black, unctuous substance that clung to his boots, or encumbered the wheels of his cab, the congener of the dazzling purity that clothes down and dell and heathery moor with a winding-sheet of silvery tissue. The gray flakes, stained already by their passage through the overhanging canopy of smoke, came whirling down upon the greasy pavement, or added to the heaps that obstructed the carriage-way, to be churned by hoofs and ground by wheels, and trampled down by the tread of innumerable feet, until they turned into a dirty pulp of half-congealed water, and so thawed and ran to add their trickling tribute to the Thames. A social philosopher, snugly posted, let us suppose, within the bay-window of a club, might have moralized on the resemblance between these fluttering flakes and the hundreds of new recruits that London daily attracts to herself, too often with the self-same result of being besmirched and black-

ened, and trodden pitilessly under foot, with perhaps the sullen river at last as the refuge of impotent despair. But, at any rate, if such a philosopher were on the outlook, he would not have found himself in his element in Bedford Row, where it was getting very dark as the afternoon wore on, and the gas had been long alight, and the legal mill turned merrily in many an office and in many a set of chambers.

On the door-posts of one of the old houses in Bedford Row was painted, in characters almost illegible through age, the name of a firm. The partners went in and out two or three times a day during term, and could not have failed to note the dilapidation of the words "Goodeve and Glegg." But they would have esteemed it as sacrilegious, had any one proposed to them to have the old inscription freshly painted. Those who had business with those very eminent family solicitors knew their way to the office well enough, and so did the



clerks and messengers of other attorneys. Good law, it would appear, like good wine, needs no bush, and the quality of the professional assistance which Messrs. Goodeve's clients asked at their hands was of a good, sound, serviceable sort, worthy of the decorous customers to whom it was supplied. The outer or clerks' room, beyond which were the apartments of Mr. Goodeve and of Mr. Glegg, was large, low-ceiled, and dingy. The grimy windows bore testimony to the tenacity with which the particles of carbon which a metropolitan fog bears on its foul wings can adhere to glass, and the panels were as mottled as if the fumes of ink had coagulated upon the worm-eaten wood-work. There were some surviving strips of carpet, but they were worn away until they formed a party-coloured network, perilous to unwary feet; the desks and stools, and hard, high-backed chairs were splashed with ink, and hacked by penknives, and presented the aspect of

scarred veterans that had undergone so much as to have grown callous to wounds and contusions.

All this ugliness and discomfort, however, were far from indicating poverty. There was never any lack of grist in that particular legal mill which did its grinding for the behoof of Messrs. Goodeve and Glegg. From floor to ceiling were stacked, on wooden shelves, in the corners of which lurked dusty cobwebs, the japanned deed-boxes, on which were emblazoned in letters of gold the names and titles of the high, puissant, and mighty ones of the earth—of the Duke of Snowdon, the Marquis of Blunderbore, Sir Hotspur Whipstock, and many a knight, lord, or esquire passing rich in lands and beeves. The emissaries of other firms came and went, and the frequent reference to “the Rolls,” the “Chancellor,” as well as darker allusions to “Vices” and “Masters,” proved that the bulk of business was of that lucrative

and creditable sort which pertains to Chancery.

There were several clerks in the room, of every variety of the genus—from the spruce young gentleman in articles, with fancy-patterned shirt, gaudy neck-tie, and bunch of charms dangling from his watch-chain, to the bald copyist, whose earnings maintained a wife and children at Wandsworth or Camden-town, and who had engrossed so many thousand sheets of legal folio, that “whereas,” “the said,” and “heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns,” ought to have become engraved upon his heart, like the name of captured Calais on that of Queen Mary. There were grave elders doing their work steadily, and pert lads who enlivened the period of drudgery by irreverent gibes and slang catch-words picked up in music-halls. The latter were a vexation to the spirit of their plodding seniors, on whose unwilling ears their thoughtless conversation forced itself.

“Silence, pray, silence, gentlemen!” said, in irritable accents, an elderly man, whose ink-stained finger-tips could never have been cleansed save by chemical agency. “How am I to get through with this marriage-settlement if you keep up this—I will say, scandalous noise close by? Already you have twice made me insert some idiotic allusions to banjos and bones, belonging, probably to an Ethiopian melody, in the middle of the trusts for remainder men; to say nothing of interpolating ‘Aunt Sally, come up!’ where ‘separate use and benefit’ should have preceded the name of the bride. I must complain to Mr. Glegg, if this continues.”

“No more than I intend to do myself,” chimed in another senior, more authoritatively than the first speaker. “Mr. Jones is perfectly right; and this disgraceful chattering shall be stopped, if I have to report your behaviour to the governor. Can’t you take pattern by Mr. Davis there?”

*he* sticks to his work, new as he is to the office ; and I can tell you he will be drawing double the salary you will, if he goes on for a twelvemonth as he has begun."

The object of the chief clerk's eulogy sat at a desk a little apart from the rest, plying his pen with an assiduity that was certainly commendable, and, to all appearance, was utterly indifferent to the idle talk of his contemporaries, as well as to the grimaces and jeering whispers with which the chidden striplings turned towards him who had just been placed in the invidious position of a model. He was a very young man, of dark, almost swarthy complexion, with lank dark hair, and black bold eyes, that looked as though they could flash on occasion. Young as he was, there was about him an air of quiet, cool determination and premature thoughtfulness, which forbade those who saw him to class him among boys ; while, although somewhat low of stature, his well-knit frame and muscular hands indicated

a considerable degree of strength. His attitude as he sat absorbed in his work, had a careless grace, very seldom to be found among the diligent subordinates of an attorney ; and his firm lips, the upper one of which was shaded by a small raven-black moustache, parted at intervals to disclose a set of teeth that were beautifully white and regular, but pointed to an unusual degree, a circumstance which gave a somewhat sinister character to a smile that might otherwise have been bright and winning.

The attire of this pattern clerk was in a different style from that of any of his colleagues in the office, where the seniors, in their bulging boots, shabby coats, and dingy wisps of black cravats, contrasted with the cheap finery of the talkative neophytes, and the more chastened splendours of the inchoate solicitors serving their apprenticeship. Mr. Davis was simply dressed, but his clothes fitted him well and were in good taste and of good quality. He displayed

no jewellery, beyond the few gold links of his watch-guard ; whereas the fingers of most of the young men were decked with big bright rings of dubious value. His hands, which were supple and well shaped, were a good deal embrowned by exposure to the sun, and showed one or two odd-looking scars, indelible records of a stirring life spent among far different scenes than that presented by the office of the Bedford Row attorney ; while on the brawny wrist of the right arm was a dark-blue mark, that had probably been produced by tattooing. Altogether, it would not have been very difficult to imagine Mr. Davis as even more at home on board ship, or careering on a half-broken horse across the llanos of South America, or "prospecting" for nuggets among the craggy heights of the Sierra Nevada, than in the legal factory of whose mechanism he was now a useful portion.

Mr. Davis, Christian name Daniel, believed to be a native of that shire of Mon-

mouth which is Welsh by nature, but English by act of Parliament, had not been long in the employment of Goodeve and Glegg. He was what the clerks of his own generation styled a "close fellow," not prone to indulge the curiosity of casual acquaintances as to his antecedents. The elder brethren of the quill were less inquisitive and more tolerant. The young man did his work sedulously, and with an intelligence that removed him from the category of mechanical scribes. He must have been well recommended, or Goodeve and Glegg would never have accepted his services. There were lazy young scamps, often, in the Bedford Row office, but they were invariably boys born in the purple, so to speak, of the lower branches of the legal profession, or of the parasitical overgrowth that hangs thereon. Solicitors, minor members, it is fair to suppose, of the great attorney interest, scriveners, law-stationers, registrars, robe-makers, judges'



clerks, and pleaders below the bar, liked their sons to learn the rudiments of the legal game in so sound and reliable an office as that of Goodeve and Glegg. The boys, even those hooked-nosed young Hebrews with the mosaic rings and breast-pins, paid premiums which were a considerable set-off against the moderate amount of their weekly wages. But Mr. Daniel Davis, whom the irreverent young fry mentioned in private conclave as "Black Dan," had entered the establishment on a different footing, and had evinced from the very first not only a willingness to labour, but also a knowledge of legal formulæ which argued some previous experience of a solicitor's craft. His salary was notoriously higher in amount than those of others who had been longer in the firm's employ than he had, and this circumstance did not tend to decrease the unpopularity which the new clerk had originally earned by his strangely ungenial and uncommu-

ñicative disposition. But, worst of all his offences, Messrs. Goodeve seemed to have a high opinion either of his ability or of his reliable qualities, since he was frequently despatched on missions as to which he breathed no word to the garrulous tenants of the desks bordering on his own.

"A gentleman—here's his card—wishes to see one of the partners," said a plump young junior from Somersetshire, who passed half his working hours in obeying the summons of the office-bell; and the chief clerk glanced at the card.

"Dashwood—Sir Frederick Dashwood—to be sure! Beg him to step in, Mr. Lobb. I think Mr. Goodeve will be disengaged soon. Sir F. is a client, after a fashion."

This last remark was guardedly made, but it was perfectly intelligible to the ears that heard it. Every lawyer has clients that are the props of his business, and other clients, not inaccurately described as

filling that capacity "after a fashion." These are the ne'er-do-weels, the black-sheep who derive some consideration on account of the respectability of the fold from which they have gone astray ; or now and then poor relations of great people, whose only crime is the impecuniosity that clings to them through life, and who are charged nothing for an occasional letter or scrap of verbal advice. The client in question, Sir Frederick Dashwood, was ushered in, and a chair was offered to him while his card was sent in to the private room of the head of the firm. He took the chair accordingly, and stared around him, as unembarrassed in his survey as if he had been contemplating the monkeys in the Zoological Gardens.

Sir Frederick Dashwood, in the plenitude of that easy contempt with which it was his habit to regard his worldly inferiors, was probably by no means aware how much several of the despised clerks

around him knew of his past and of his present career. That he was the son of a doctor ; that he owed money to all Israel ; that his scores with West End tradesmen were classed as " bad debts ;" that he had started in a crack regiment of light cavalry, and was now an infantry captain whose " papers" were lodged at the Horse Guards, and over the price of whose commission his creditors would wrangle like dogs snarling over a bone ; and that he led a shiftless, hand-to-mouth existence, replete with lying excuses and false promises, was notorious. Even the careful old conveyancing clerk, who was obliged to look long and sharply at every sixpence, so many were the claims on his weekly hire, would not have relished the life of harassing expedients and self-humiliation which were inseparable from the condition of such a one as Sir Frederick. Still, somehow, the very youngsters who sneered at him, envied him. He was very well

dressed. His pearl-gray gloves were spotless and unwrinkled. The prettiest trinkets rattled on his watch-chain. He had an ineffable air of assurance, which suited well with his handsome reckless face and well-shaped form, but which, if never so slightly exaggerated, would have degenerated into a swagger. He was a baronet, too, after all, and belonged to clubs that were hard of access; and he might, at any moment, marry an heiress, cast his old slough of poverty, and come forth gilded and sleek, like a snake in its summer skin.

"Mr. Goodeve can see Sir Frederick now," said the voice of the plump lad from Somersetshire, as its owner emerged from the attorney's inner room; and Sir Frederick rose, and prepared to follow the messenger. As he did so, he jostled slightly against the desk at which the dark-complexioned young clerk, of whom mention has been previously made, was plying his pen.

"Beg pardon, I'm sure," said Dashwood, half superciliously, and as he spoke he looked down ; and Mr. Davis looking up, the eyes of the men met. Sir Frederick gave a start that was quite perceptible.

"By Jove!" he muttered, through the tawny moustache that overhung his mouth, "I didn't expect." And then he bit his lip, and grew first red, and then paler than before. The dark young clerk shrugged his shoulders.

"It was a mere accident," he said, civilly, but in measured accents—"an inadvertence which we had better both forget." And with a cold bow he bent again over his task. The words were commonplace enough, and it could only be said that they went beyond what so trifling a circumstance required ; but the peculiar tone of the speaker indicated a hidden meaning, unintelligible to the bystanders. Sir Frederick had, perhaps, a clue to the speaker's drift which the others did not possess, for, with

a smile, and an apologetic murmur of "Confoundedly clumsy on my part!" he passed on to Mr. Goodeve's presence.

"And that's the chap they call Dashing Dashwood!" muttered one of the juvenile scribes in the ear of his nearest friend. "Lets himself be put down in that sort of style by a quill-driver at thirty shillings a week, like Black Dan yonder; and instead of kicking him for his answer, slinks off like a cock that won't fight."

"You be quiet, Larkins!" growled out the more experienced comrade referred to. "Can't you see how the game lies? The baronet's not one to show the white-feather for nothing. He has a plaguy sight too good an idea of himself for that. Don't you see that it is evident he and Davis have met before somewhere or other, and that neither of them much cares, for reasons best known to themselves, to acknowledge the acquaintance?"

After which rejoinder, the substance of

which soon made the circuit of the office, all the juniors began to eye the silent penman with a renewed curiosity, while they exhausted their ingenuity in efforts to guess the possible nature of the connection between their fellow-clerk and Sir Frederick Dashwood.

Sir Frederick's interview with Mr. Goodeve did not last long, nor was its result, so far as could be judged, peculiarly satisfactory. Dashwood came out with a darkling brow, savagely tugging and twisting his moustache, threw on his hat rather than placed it on his head, and made his way from the office with quick impatient strides, heedless of the falling snow and the half-melted drifts that here and there impeded the passage of a pedestrian. He reached the nearest main thoroughfare, and after some moments of angry expectancy, hailed a Hansom cabman who was plying for hire with his vehicle temporarily converted into a tandem by the addition of a leader, and



who was jocund at the fact that stress of weather doubles even the elastic tariff of a Hansom, jumped into it, and had himself conveyed to the "Flag Club," where he could smoke cigars and play pool until it was time to dine. He was the last to be admitted on that afternoon to the presence of either of the partners in the Bedford Row firm, and indeed the labours of the day were nearly concluded by the time Sir Frederick had got clear of the legal precincts. The scratching sound of the pens, as they were ceaselessly applied to paper and parchment, grew feebler, and finally ceased altogether. Unfinished deeds were folded, and there was tying with red tape and green ribbon, and docketing, and consigning to pigeon-holes in bureaux and compartments in desks, of many a bundle of documents that would have thrown light upon the private history of more than one family of standing. And then came shuffling of feet, and putting on of greatcoats,

and hunting out of umbrellas that had been placed in out-of-the-way nooks, and a babble of voices, this time unrestrained by the reproofs of the staid seniors.

Out from his private room came Mr. Glegg, pink-faced, plump, and brisk, a florid little man, whom no one would have taken for an attorney, so much did his aspect suggest sillabubs and new-mown hay, cowslips, cream, and other rural associations, but who was, nevertheless, as keen and tenacious a practitioner as any litigant, wishing to wear out the purse and patience of a feebler adversary, could desire as his pilot among the shoals and rapids of law. Mr. Glegg had a word or two to say, admonitory or exhortatory, to the office-lads and articulated pupils ; another word or two, of a more technical sort, to the steady, working scribes ; and then he buttoned up his glossy overcoat, and tripped actively off to where his brougham, with a strong satin-skinned horse in the shafts, that had

cost as much, for all his cob-like sturdiness of build, as many a pair of showy steppers, was waiting to bear him off to his trim villa on the Surrey side of the Thames. Then there was a general move, the dark Mr. Davis being the last to rise from his seat. He had not, indeed, as yet reached down his hat from the peg on which it hung, when Mr. Goodeve opened the door of his private room, and called out :

“Any one here? Oh, Mr. Davis, I see. Please bring me in that deed-box of Lady Livingston’s—the dowager’s, I mean—before you leave.”

The clerk complied ; and Mr. Goodeve proceeded to unlock the japanned case with a patent key, and to toss over the various bundles of papers which it contained.

“That will do ; thank you,” said the lawyer. “No ; stop one moment !” And he continued his examination of the contents of the box. Clerk and employer presented, personally, a striking contrast :

the one young, vigorous, and of low stature ; the other tall, thin, and frail, with colourless hair, and limp whiskers that had scarcely found it worth while to become gray, but who was one of those persons whom it is impossible to conceive as having ever been young. "I shall remain a little while here, to look through these papers and refresh my memory," said the lawyer, half-absently, "before I go home. I got this letter"—and he selected one with a coronet on the seal from amongst a heap of others—"when I was too much occupied to attend to it at once. By-the-by, Davis, I may want you to go down with me in a few days to a place a short distance from town—Richmond, in fact—to witness a will. You are a close, quiet fellow, and will not mention it in the office, to oblige me?"


"Certainly not. I am no great talker at any time," returned Black Dan, with a grave smile.

"That's right, that's right!" said his employer. "Now, Mr Davis, I need not detain you. I shall lock the door myself."

And in a minute more the clerk was in the street, with his face set westward, as he walked rapidly onwards through the gathering darkness and the driving snow.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MR. DAVIS AT HOME.

OLBORN and New Oxford Street, when a north-westerly wind, cold and dâmp as well, drives blinding showers of sleety snow into the faces of pedestrians who have turned their backs upon the City, are not perhaps to be reckoned as among the most genial spots on earth. During the late afternoon of that winter's day which Sir Frederick Dashwood had selected for his visit to the office of Messrs. Goodeve and Glegg, these important thoroughfares were seen at their worst—hillocks of stained snow narrowing

the carriage-road, the flag-stones a pool of mire and half-frozen water, and the jostling and growling incessant as the foot-passengers struggled to maintain their equilibrium on the slippery pavement. Those who walked were perforce by far more numerous than is the case in ordinary weather, since every one of the rare omnibuses that ploughed its weary way westward was black with steaming humanity within, and shivering humanity without, and being overfull already, held steadily on its course, regardless of the despairing signals of the many candidates for conveyance. The few cabs that were visible, extra-horsed, prowled in search of belated fares who would prove liberal paymasters, and were luxuries beyond the mark of those whom prudence or habit had rendered thrifty custodians of their loose silver.

Among all those who, under these dispiriting circumstances, plodded from the scene of the day's toil, there was not one

whose tread was more elastic, or whose foot was surer, than those of the pattern clerk from Bedford Row, whom we have heard described as Mr. Daniel Davis. The rough weather that made many a narrow-chested slave of the desk cough painfully as he confronted it, and which even hale men met with an impatient dislike, really seemed to refresh him after his sedentary labours. The more the wind blew, and the whirling flakes and arrowy sleet thickened, the greater was the cheerfulness with which he breasted the storm, as if the contest warmed his blood, and gave a zest to his monotonous life which was usually lacking. Once, at a street corner, he glanced up at the hurrying clouds that peered blackly through the murky air and pelting snow-showers.

“North-west, by west, three-quarters west, as near as I can make out the points,” he muttered to himself; “and will blow half a gale by sundown, at sea. A night



for close-reefed topsails and hatches battened down, I somehow think," he added, absently, and then, with a start and a heavy sigh, strode on, unceremoniously shouldering his way through the groups that had collected, here and there, around the lighted portals of some house of public entertainment, where alcoholic aid, "hot with," was in immense request as a corrective of the chill damp of the dying day.

Hyde Park was already in sight when, crossing the road, Mr. Daniel Davis plunged into a labyrinth of dismal little streets, every one of which had doubtless seen better days, before the tide of fickle Fashion ebbed off southwards, and carried with it rank, fortune, and expenditure. When Grosvenor reigned supreme among squares, and before upstart Belgravia was, as old nurses love to say of flesh and blood mushrooms, born or thought of, these streets had been thriving metropolitan

arteries, where a snug competence could be readily amassed by sedulous hangers-on of Fortune's favourites. Now, it was but a poverty-stricken district, where shops pined, and green-grocers became prematurely bald and insolvent, and public-houses were quieter and more select than their landlords could have wished them to be, and the superannuated butlers and ex-ladies' maids found it harder every year to secure an adequate amount of weekly guineas for those dingy apartments wherein the cadets of so many great families had formerly taken up their expensive quarters, that the dear girls might have the benefit of attending Cousin Lacquerton's parties, and that papa might jog the earl's memory as to that very desirable appointment as salaried Inspector of Things in General.

In one of the most decayed of these smoke-dried and deserted thoroughfares, Great Eldon Street by name, but the narrowness of which suggested to inquiring

minds the idea that the dwellers in Little Eldon Street might easily shake hands with one another from the opposite first-floor windows, was a lean little house, on the dark-green street door of which was a small brass plate bearing the monosyllable "Gulp." The word did not look like a patronymic, but it was one; and the faint-spirited female with artificial flowers in her antediluvian bonnet, who apologized for the "servant girl's" absence without leave, as she came to that door in answer to the clerk's knock, was Miss—by brevet of seniority, Mrs.—Gulp, the landlady. Thirty-five years, as she was fond of mentioning over the social tea-cup, had Maria Gulp eaten the bread of servitude as young ladies' maid, lady's maid, and at last house-keeper, at Hardup Hall, the residence of the Right Hon. the Earl of Diddleham. She was not called Gulp there, however; she was called Harris or Willis, or by some such appellation, more euphonious than the

unfortunate four letters which she had inherited, and the change was "considered in the wages." It is to be supposed that she got her wages, in spite of the reputation of the noble family of Downie for paying nobody ; or, if not, visitors must have been bountiful and perquisites abundant, since Maria certainly saved money, and set up comfortably as a Brighton lodging-house keeper, with a good house in the Paragon, and a sum in the funds. In an evil hour, however, the Honourable Frederick Downie, with his wife and child, took her apartments for the benefit of the sea-air ; and the distinguished lodger not merely did not pay his rent—*that*, she had hardly expected—but he actually succeeded in inducing Mrs. Gulp to invest her savings in his pocket ; of course at a thumping rate of interest, far beyond the pittance from the consols. The poor woman must have known perfectly well that Frederick Downie was a rogue and a knave ; but her

cherished weakness was her loyalty to that illustrious family, under whose roof her best years had been spent, and she made the investment as desired, and was ruined by it, of course ; and thus sunk to shabbiness, poverty, and a mean little abode in Great Eldon Street, where she eked out her slender livelihood as best she might, by letting every available corner of her house.

It was now what Mrs. Gulp called the "dead time of the year," a time which begins when parched and parboiled London rushes out of town, in quest of seas and mountains ; and since the commencement of this stagnant season, Mr. Davis had been the tenant of Mrs. Gulp's drawing-room. She had sighed when she accepted him in that capacity ; not that he was unpunctual with his rent, or obnoxious as an inmate ; but then he was a clerk, and in a subordinate position withal as regarded attorneydom ; and therefore the landlady

felt as if his residence among her Lares and Penates brought with it some sour after-taste along with the sweets of periodical payments. She could no longer hope in her shabby lodgings to entertain even the minor aristocracy, but she still wished to harbour those who, if not the rose, had been near enough to that flower to have imbibed a sprinkling of its scent. Had Mr. Davis been a tutor, or a land-agent, or a turfite trencherman to some sporting peer, Mrs. Gulp would have been better pleased. As it was, and in hopes of brighter times, when town should fill, she consoled herself by remembering that Messrs. Goodeve were at least eminent solicitors, with whom Lord Diddleham had had transactions, until he quarrelled with them for not consenting to his mortgaging Cloverley Meadows twice over.

“Yes, a very bad day, Mrs. Gulp. My sister is upstairs, I suppose?” said the lodger, civilly eluding his landlady’s inco-

herent eloquence on the twin subjects of the rough weather and the unjustifiable truancy of Betsy Jane, the maid. Mrs. Gulp was, like many of her sex who have suffered pecuniary losses, fond of hearing the sound of her own voice as she sang pæans in praise of bygone glories at Hard-up, with jeremiads on the present degeneracy of the vile world around her; and sometimes Mr. Davis was good-natured enough to be a patient listener. He was in no humour now, however, for such discourse; so, without further ceremony, he made his way upstairs, and threw open the door of the tiny three-cornered sitting-room. It seemed empty at first, save for the scanty and quaint furniture. There was no light save that of the flickering fire, for the blinds were pulled down, and the faded curtains drawn to the full extent of their width, or rather narrowness, as if for the purpose of excluding the leaden twilight that brooded in Great Eldon Street.

The fire burned but dimly, a few tongues of flame leaping lambent above the black surface of the half-ignited coals. The room, as has been said, appeared untenanted ; but presently a form that had hitherto crouched on a low stool, half-hidden by a cumbrous arm-chair of the Georgian type of upholstery, started up almost as abruptly as some gnome or elf springs forward in a pantomime.

An elf ! In very truth, the word seemed fairly applicable to her who thus suddenly uprose, with the fitful firelight gleaming on her pale, keen face. A young girl, as years went, but with an expression so weird, so old, and so strange, that her age, like that of some fairy changeling, might have been reckoned by centuries. She was low of stature, slight, and small, with a peculiar suppleness of limb and elasticity of movement, such as we associate with the pliant vertebræ of the eel or the snake, rather than with those of a being of our



own race and blood. Her face showed no tinge or trace of colour, and lacked also the plump softness of early girlhood ; but the features were regular, and not ill shaped, and the oval of the countenance was perfect. Her hair, which was loosely twisted around the small head, was fair, but of an unusual tint, without the golden sheen we admire, free from the redder tinge which often accompanies a delicate clearness of complexion, and approaching more nearly to the shade of pale amber than to any known hue. Her teeth were very white, small, and regular ; but the most noticeable peculiarity of her face was, that the eyes appeared to possess some of those properties which the ancients attributed to the chameleon, and to change their colour at will. Such eyes there are, which one observer will behold as of a pale gray, and another describe as brown or green, but which, under the influence of emotion, can glitter as variously as the multicoloured

fires of the opal—eyes not beautiful, but with a terrible fascination about their infinite mobility and fierce intentness. Such was the sole occupant of the hired drawing-room in Great Eldon Street.

“So, brother, you have come at last, to save me from my own thoughts. I have been alone a long while now, and find myself but sorry company,” said the girl slowly, and with a sad smile.

“It’s but a dull life for you, my dear,” returned the young man, as he stooped forward to stir the fire; “a life fitter for a snail, or a slug, than for such as you are, my poor wood-jay. No more pupils as yet, I suppose, though, perhaps, you did not get so far as to the library, where they promised to take in the letters in answer to your advertisements?”

“I have called at the library : there were no letters,” answered the sister, dreamily. “People do not, it seems, believe in talent that knocks so humbly at their doors, and

so I had only the three little learners to put through their paces. I almost fell asleep over the feeble tinkling of the piano under the uncertain touch of the clumsy little fingers. No! A music-mistress, unless she is lucky enough to have titled patrons, or to be a newspaper celebrity, does not find her path strewn with roses here, in this astonishing London, where you and I are, brother! I wish you had consented to my wish, and let me go on the stage, according to my first idea."

His face grew darker, and he frowned and bit his lip; but when he looked up again there was a wonderful tenderness in his voice, as he said: "You know, as well as I do, how glad I am when I can give you what you ask, and how sorely it vexes me to thwart you in what you long for. But the stage—here in England—would have been unsafe. I mean," he added, hurriedly, "that you would inevitably have been recognized, your story known and

bruited about, all the painful past raked up again, and that would scarcely have been right, dear, would it? What would be said of me, too, or who would accept of service from one whose hand—— Never mind that!" he muttered, as he held it out, in the ruddy light of the fire. "The deed I did was done for your sake, my sister; and if it were undone, and the man living yet, a thousand leagues away, I would not know rest until I had paid the heavy debt in full. But our aim, when we came here, was to bury the past, was it not?"

"And so the past is buried—buried, dead, and gone," replied the girl, with sudden playfulness, and gliding lightly across to lay her slender hand caressingly on her brother's arm—"and we are Mr. Davis and Miss Davis, supposed to be natives of the north of England, and in London just now to earn our bread: I, by my poor powers as a musician; and you, as the most diligent clerk that ever entered

Messrs. Goodeve's office. And that reminds me, Bruce, that you must be hungry, and that I have postponed my dinner, much to the tearful perplexity of good Mrs. Gulp, until you should come back to share it." So saying, she rang the bell ; and after some delay, the truant Betsy Jane, one of those typical handmaidens who execute all work equally ill, and whose rebellious locks strayed picturesquely from under the restraining cap, arrived to lay a cloth and make the needful preparations for a scrambling and miscellaneous repast, that was not precisely dinner, tea, or supper, but united some of the characteristics of all three. Then the constituents of the meal itself were placed upon the table along with two or three black bottles ; and brother and sister sat down to partake of their cheer, the one eating hungrily, almost fiercely ; the other doing little more than taste what was set before her.

"And now, Bruce, let me hear if you

have learned anything that may be of use to us afterwards," said the girl, as her brother finally thrust aside his plate, and drank his last glass of frothing beer. "You were to tell me, you remember, everything." This was the second time that she had addressed him by this name, unfamiliar to the ears of his fellow-clerks.

"Humph! There was little in the morning, at least, worth the telling," said the young man moodily, striking the fender with his boot-heel as he spoke, and fixing his eyes on the red caverns between the coals. "The partners, if that matters, seem to put more confidence in me every day. Twice I was sent out to cash cheques, one of them for a large amount. I also was intrusted with a sum of money, gold and notes, to carry to a person whose receipt I obtained after a few minutes of haggling. The nature of the transaction was not explained to me, but I gathered that it was a compromise of some sort. We have many

such on the stocks in our office. This is the second or third time that I have made payments for the firm."

"Good!" said the attentive sister, laying her slender forefinger upon the table, as if to mark a point. "Nothing could be better. Now go on."

"Easier said than done," replied the clerk, with some embarrassment—"since there was abundance of routine-work, six-and-eightpennyworths, of no interest to anybody who does not pay costs, or pocket them, to get through. To be sure, there dropped in a visitor—one whom we both know, that Sir Frederick Dashwood."

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Davis, starting forward, while her neutral-tinted eyes began to sparkle and darken; "the baronet came in! Did he know you?"

"Of course he did, sister. The recognition was mutual, and about equally pleasant, I should say, for both parties," rejoined the model clerk. "At any rate,"

he added bitterly, "the military dandy had the sense to keep his tongue quiet as to my real name, and the place where we had met before. He grew pale—white as a ghost, would be the truer word, as he spied me out. Perhaps he thought of the day when, arm in arm with as great a scoundrel as himself, he sauntered down from barracks, and saw his precious brother-officer carried home feet foremost."

"Hush, hush!" said the girl, in a low, earnest voice; "let the dead rest! He of whom you speak paid a heavy forfeit, and we are quits now. So this fine Sir Frederick came to Bedford Row, did he? Of course I can guess his errand. He wants, I suppose, what we all want. Do you think he got anything by his visit?"

"I should say, decidedly not," returned the brother, with a scornful laugh, "to judge by his looks when he went out. These London men of fashion—'swells,' as the old country phrase is—pride themselves on



the cool calmness of their manners and appearance, and really there is something of the Red Man in their cold, passionless bearing, as if they would hardly condescend to be astonished by an earthquake in Pall-Mall. But flesh and blood cannot stand the wearing anxieties that go along with pretentious poverty, and not show some trace of it. Dashwood is sorely tried, I can see that ; and when the lawyer refused him a loan to-day, as I have no doubt he did, he could not keep up the impassive stoicism of his class. Men don't make bargains for their souls, nowadays, at least directly, or else"——

"Or else you and I know where Apollyon could buy one cheaply," broke in his sister, with a curl on her mobile upper lip and a glow in her variable eyes. "But the day may come, perhaps, when Sir Frederick Dashwood may be thankful to treat with us, ay, and to sue humbly too, for our friendly help. Never mind what I mean,

just now, Bruce, dear. You know I have a trick of waiting until I think the fruit is ripe, before I gather it."

"I know," rejoined Bruce, if such were his name, "that your brains are worth mine a dozen times over, and that you can keep half a score of trains of thought separate; whereas with me they would soon get into kinks like a tangled fishing-line. And I know, too, that when I was a boy, always in disgrace at home or in hot-water abroad on account of some prank or another, I found in you the truest and kindest sister that ever sided with a wild lad against crabbed neighbours and angry relations; and that when I came back, sick nearly unto death, from that whaling voyage, when the *Good Intent* was wrecked on the coast of Tierra del Fuego, you nursed me, till, from the living skeleton that I was, I rose up to take my place again in the working world. I swore to myself then, sister, as since then to you, to back your quarrel, let

it be with whom it might, and to follow your lead in all things, right or wrong. After all, what am I?" he added, tossing back the dark hair from his brow; "or what good could be looked for from such as I am, a rolling stone that moss has never had the time to stick to! Sailor, hunter, trapper, teller in a bank, and clerk to a lawyer; I've gone through more, in the years since I first ran away from home, than most of double my age, and just got rations and kit—not always that—for my pains and my danger. If ever I'm to make a fortune, it won't be through my own steering, I know that. You must pilot the ship, if we are to come snugly into harbour."

There was an air of genuine admiration about him as he thus spoke, and, indeed, his manner towards his sister was invariably gentle, and almost deferential.

"I will try to do so, Bruce," she answered him, smiling; "but I want to know a little

more of my bearings before I shape my course. Did nothing else occur, while you were at the office, which may be twisted into some source of ultimate profit? Very valuable secrets are often to be picked up, like nuggets and precious stones among the spurs of the Sierra Nevada, in attorneys' rooms."

The young man took a moment for consideration. "I am afraid I have learned little worth talking about," he said at length: "Mr. Goodeve did say that he wished me to accompany him shortly to Richmond, to witness some old dame's will—one Lady Livingston's, perhaps, by the way, though I never thought of it before, the same with whom Miss Maybrook"—and at the mention of that name an expression as of pain flitted across his swarthy face—"now lives."


"Violet Maybrook! Of course it is!" answered the girl with flashing eyes. "The news you have brought me, Bruce,

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may prove more important than you guess ; but I must have time to think it out. Poor boy, you look weary ! Shall I sing to you ? My singing used to please you, when nothing else could do so." And without further prelude, she took her seat at the piano, and sang song after song, until the cloud passed away from her brother's gloomy brow, like that which the strains of David's harp banished from the spirit of Saul. A wonderful voice, so flexible, so clear, so sweet, that it might have been the carol of a bird ; while rarely has a more skilful touch evoked music from so wretched an instrument as that battered old piano. Quite suddenly she rose from her seat and held out her hand. " Good-night, brother," she said ; " the last air has awakened a string of old memories, and I want to sleep them away, if I can. I will be up early to-morrow ; but now, good-night !"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

“Y lady is at home to *you*, sir, of course,” said the porter at the gate-lodge, in reply to Mr. Goodeve’s mechanically-muttered inquiry ; and, indeed, the solicitor was a not infrequent visitor at the Fountains, and stood high in the esteem of the household. Lady Livingston’s landed property was certainly not large when compared with those colossal congeries of acres which go along with many a coronet, but the rent-roll was of a comfortable amount, and the holdings, as usual in the midland counties,

numerous in proportion to the size of the estate. There was, therefore, what with repairs, renewals of leases, fines, recoveries, covenants, and local custom, a good deal of business to transact, and the dowager chose that her lawyers should treat with her tenantry on all points on which a dispute might conceivably arise. She was a shrewd old lady in her way, and much as she liked money and power, she had an abhorrence of litigation.

“The best way to avoid going to law, my dear,” she would say to her kinswoman, Beatrice Fleming, “is to choose a good lawyer, and let him fight your battles for you. You may laugh, but it’s true. Goodeve and Glegg, and men of that stamp, hate and detest an action in the Common Pleas, or whatever they call it, as much as a cat dislikes wet feet, and somehow they generally manage to settle things in a friendly way. Before I hit upon this idea I had an agent down at Heavitree,

who drew a salary of four hundred a year for setting me by the ears with half the farmers, and allowing the others to play the mischief with the land, and do just as they pleased. Goodeve's yearly bill never comes to half what he saves for me—I say Goodeve, because I don't think Glegg troubles himself very much about me.”

And it was the fact that Lady Livingston was one of those clients whose affairs the senior partner in the Bedford Row firm preferred to keep in his own hands, and on which he seldom or never consulted his yoke-fellow.

Mr. Goodeve was not alone ; he was accompanied by a clerk, a dark young man, who walked silently after his employer as the latter entered the grounds, and who was indeed no other than Mr. Daniel Davis to whose residence and domestic life we have been lately introduced. Very stoopingly, very awkwardly, did the solicitor, who was, it has been mentioned, tall, thin,



and elderly, traverse the firm glistening gravel, on which his subordinate moved with so light and free a tread. Mr. Good-eve, never robust at any time, had lately shown signs of failing health. His powers of attending continuously to business were not what they had been a year ago. They were not what they had been even six months ago. The penmen in Bedford Row had begun to find this out. It was no secret from his junior partner. Mr. Glegg had said in confidence to the wife of his bosom that old Goodeve was no longer, as a working lawyer, worth his salt, and had bemoaned the perverse pertinacity which prevented him from retiring, or, at any rate, from agreeing to some more reasonable rule as to the division of profits. And Glegg had protested that he had himself to toil like a horse, and yet to defer in all things to the opinion of a colleague whose judgment grew constantly less reliable, but who remembered his po-

sition as the moneyed head of the house.

There was something almost plaintive in the frequent efforts which Mr. Goodeve made, as he approached the mansion, to assume a jaunty air, and to shake off the outward signs of debility. There was no reason why the lawyer and his clerk should have made their way on foot across a portion of the grounds. The gates could have been opened, and the carriage could have driven up to the white stone pillars of the portico. But Mr. Goodeve had preferred to alight. The country air, he declared aloud, "freshened him up." He looked around him as he walked, and uttered laudatory comments upon the weather, which had again become dry, and was crisp, keen, and frosty, so that the roads were hard, and there was a silvery rime of hoar-frost every morning on the grass of lawn and meadow.

The shrubbery at the Fountains was, for

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a suburban shrubbery, large, and sundry paths wound tortuously betwixt the masses of evergreens. There had been some intention, on the part of the landscape-gardener who laid out the pleasure-grounds, or of the nabob his patron, to form a leafy labyrinth in imitation of the neighbouring maze at Hampton Court ; but the design had been abandoned, and its sole result was, that the miniature jungle was intersected by an unusual number of narrow and mossgrown tracks. The spot was a favourite one with Violet Maybrook, who would sometimes pace for an hour beneath the shadow of the black fir-trees and towering cedars that rose high above the glistening leaves of the holly, the bay, and the laurel, communing with her own ever-busy thoughts. There were two parts of the pleasure which she sought, as by instinct—the gloomy and neglected shrubbery, where the weeds grew rankly, without fear of the gardener's hoe ; and the breezy

terrace that commanded a prospect of the bright river speeding onwards to the sea. The latter view was replete with life and motion; the former was melancholy enough to have been that of some islet in the Dismal Swamp where runaway negroes hid their outlawed heads; but it suited well with Violet's mood. She was in the shrubbery when the clang of the gate-bell heralded Mr. Goodeve's approach, and, herself unseen, she gazed forth between the spear-pointed leaves and scarlet berries of the hollies, and saw the lawyer and his clerk walk from the lodge towards the house. Why does she start and turn pale as she sees two such commonplace persons pacing side by side up the smooth, firm carriage-road? Mr. Goodeve, with his thin grayish hair, his uncertain step, and feeble gait, was scarcely capable of inspiring alarm or agitation in any beholder who had not the ill-luck to owe him money. As for dark Mr. Daniel Davis, he was

surely a highly-respectable young clerk, in professional attendance on his employer. Yet Violet, herself unseen, watched his every movement with anxiety, and her eyes dilated as she looked out from her leafy ambush, and her breathing all but ceased, so that she resembled a marble effigy of Terror more than a sentient being, so white and motionless was she.

"No, no!" she murmured, as the two figures disappeared behind the pillars of the portico: "I was not mistaken. It was he; somewhat graver and paler than I remember him, but with a lurking devil behind his eyes still. He is here for no good; I am sure of that."

These expressions could hardly have been applicable to Samuel Goodeve, gentleman, attorney-at-law.

By what invisible telegraph do those mysterious gnomes and brownies who make our beds, cook our dinners, and execute our behests, those familiar strangers of the

basement who dwell beneath our roofs for half a lifetime without our gaining more than a skin-deep knowledge of their real dispositions, learn what goes on among their worldly superiors in the drawing-room? That they do so is beyond dispute. Sarah Jane, beyond a patent weakness for ribbons, and a suspected hankering after followers, is a sealed book to Lady Fanny, whose hair she brushes, and at whose toilet she ministers. But be sure that Sarah Jane knows a great deal more of Lady Fanny than that titled Girl of the Period would consider possible, and has a very decided opinion as to her character and conduct. It might be wholesome for young Sir Harry, curled darling of Fortune though he be, to hear what "That fellow, my man," stolid, mute, lynx-eyed, respectful, has to say of his master behind his back. The Vehmgericht of servitude sits in judgment on us all, and before that pitiless tribunal, crowns and coronets, robes

of state and gorgeous uniforms, nay, even the decorum of deans and of bankers, are of no more account than they will prove hereafter in the grim presence of Death.

It is to the dowager's credit that Lady Livingston's servants, as a rule, approved of Lady Livingston. They were by no means blind to her failings, but they were good enough to be lenient to human imperfections, and to admit that, as mistresses went, where there was one better, there were a dozen worse. The testamentary disposal of her property was a matter of immense interest to them, not from selfish motives, but from an odd feeling of semi-feudal loyalty which still lingers in some households. They had themselves no expectation of deriving any extraordinary benefits from her ladyship's posthumous liberality. "My lady's own maid," a tried abigail of sixty summers, and the old coachman, who was growing too frail for a start in alien service, would probably receive

small pensions. The rest had no anticipation of much beyond what was curtly summed up by the silent-shod butler as "the correct thing—a year's wages, a suit of mourning, and ten pounds apiece." So that this was not one of those ghoul-like establishments in which the kitchen looks out for the profitable decease of the eccentric master or mistress upstairs.

But the dowager's servants were quite excited at the notion that a new will was being executed upstairs, where the lawyer, Mr. Goodeve, and his clerk, were now in conference with Lady Livingston. The testatrix herself was not one of those weak-minded persons who babble about their intentions to all unconcerned, or who choose confidants from sheer inability to keep a secret. Yet the domestics were as perfectly aware that a will was being read over, signed, sealed, and delivered, and that this instrument was the third or fourth of its species that had been successively prepared, as if



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a suburban shrubbery, large, and sundry paths wound tortuously betwixt the masses of evergreens. There had been some intention, on the part of the landscape-gardener who laid out the pleasure-grounds, or of the nabob his patron, to form a leafy labyrinth in imitation of the neighbouring maze at Hampton Court ; but the design had been abandoned, and its sole result was, that the miniature jungle was intersected by an unusual number of narrow and mossgrown tracks. The spot was a favourite one with Violet Maybrook, who would sometimes pace for an hour beneath the shadow of the black fir-trees and towering cedars that rose high above the glistening leaves of the holly, the bay, and the laurel, communing with her own ever-busy thoughts. There were two parts of the pleasaunce which she sought, as by instinct—the gloomy and neglected shrubbery, where the weeds grew rankly, without fear of the gardener's hoe ; and the breezy

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to that noble slave that man treats but sorrowfully, yet from whose allegiance he derives such profit and such pride.

"Sir Frederick do know the points of a horse for a young one, now, he do." Such was the old coachman's verdict, when the baronet had strolled off. "He'd have made a living, if he'd been in that line of life, as a dealer, or a farrier, or steeple-chasing, he would."

"Ay, and an honest living," chimed in the chief stableman cordially, and quite unconscious of the sarcasm on Dashwood's present means of subsistence which his words conveyed.

Lady Livingston was unusually gracious to her graceless kinsman when she had completed her business with the lawyer. She was, indeed, in a peculiarly affable mood, and all around her appeared to come in for a share of her expansive benevolence. She had pressed Mr. Goodeve to stay and dine, an invitation which she privately re-

garded as a greater compliment than did the eminent family solicitor, who was well used to take his seat beside the social mahogany of still more exalted persons than a dowager baroness. But she was of the old school; he, elderly though he was, of the new, and had sat habitually at the boards of very great people, like the Marquis of Windermere, Lord Harrowgate, and the Duke of Snowdon, conscious that his serviceable aid in getting the family coach round awkward corners and out of quagmires of the law, was good and valuable consideration for their hospitality. She had been almost angry with his clerk, Mr. Davis, because he declined the glass of sherry which the butler brought to him after he had played his part as a witness. But she had consoled herself by the reflection, that the clerk—a decent-looking young man, probably from Wales—was doubtless shy and nervous in the presence of one of her own lofty rank, and had smiled as she

acknowledged his parting salute. She was now very genial in her reception of Sir Frederick.

"I have come—like a prodigal as I am—to invite myself to dinner, if I may," the young man had said, looking very handsome and good-humoured as he spoke.

"I am very glad to hear it. I meant to have scolded you for neglecting me so long, but I will put that off. You will give me plenty of occasions for that, never fear," returned the old lady, with unusual warmth of manner. She actually thanked him, later on, for coming to see her so soon after his return, bade him welcome to the Fountains, and quoted the proverbial saying, that blood is thicker than water ; whereat Dashwood, who could remember many a metaphorical rap over the knuckles received from his imperious old relative, hardly believed his ears.

"I declare," he said afterwards, "I feel certain that, if I had asked her that even-

ing, the old woman would have given me a cheque for five hundred, without boggling about lawyers and security. Five hundred ; yes, or six, perhaps. And I, like a fool, was afraid to back my luck !”

Dinner, on that day at the Fountains, was more lively than was often the case, and was served on a scale of unwonted splendour. Some rare old wine—rarer even than that which had been uncorked for Oswald Charlton—was brought forth from the cob-webbed crypt of its concealment, to tickle the palate of the guest. “That’s amazing Burgundy!” observed Dashwood, as his glass was refilled with the liquid ruby ; “I’ve a faint recollection of its flavour as a boy. But it’s better now.”

“Yes, it’s better now,” said the dowager ; “at least if age makes perfect. My lord had it as a present from Nesselrode or Pozzo di Borgo, I forget which, in the year ’14, when he was at Paris. There is not much of it left.”



Violet Maybrook's part must on that day have been a difficult one to play. She had met Dashwood in the presence of Lady Livingston and of Miss Fleming; and nothing could have been less calculated to attract remark than the manner in which she did meet him.

"I am glad to see you again," she had said, simply, and her whole demeanour was that of one who is pleased to encounter an old acquaintance, though rather for the sake of the association with other scenes and times than on account of any personal preference. But it was trying to her haughty spirit to have to spend hours in the company of the man whom she loved in spite of herself, and of the contempt which she could not but feel for his nature. And this ordeal was the more irksome, because Sir Frederick chose to pay marked attention to his cousin Beatrice, and to exert for her benefit all his powers of pleasing. That he succeeded in pleasing

Miss Fleming was more than Violet could perceive ; but there was no doubt of his having at all events achieved the minor triumph of riveting her notice, and of bringing to her lips, once and again, the smiles which had of late been rarely seen there. It was a remarkable circumstance that Lady Livingston's indulgence towards her scapegrace relative extended on this occasion so far that she seemed to regard with positive approval the efforts of the ruined baronet to ingratiate himself with the heiress, and more than once backed Dashwood's entreaty that his cousin would sing some song, "an old favourite," to use his own words, when Beatrice manifested some reluctance to comply with his request.

"I thought the dowager hated the man;" it was thus that Violet communed with herself ; "but I suppose old women can be whimsical, as well as young ones. To judge by her present conduct, a bystander might suppose Sir Frederick to be a suitor

of the most eligible sort, whose proposals it was desirable to meet half-way, and that my noble employer was ready at a moment's warning to utter the traditional 'Bless you, my children,' by way of benison on this interesting pair."

Keen-sighted as Violet was, her powers of perception were somewhat obscured by the tempest of jealous wrath that raged within her heart, and to conceal which, she had need of all her self-control. A very astute and impartial observer might have noticed that the autocratic mistress of the Fountains, with all her benignity of look and manner, eyed her insolvent kinsman with somewhat of the expression which a cat wears when watching the movements of a half-killed mouse. With what amused intentness Puss observes the panting creature as it stirs afresh ; how blandly, yet with what pitiless vigilance in her green eyes, does she note its struggles to escape ; nay, how softly, as in sign of encouragement, does

she pat with her velvet paw, purring the while, the trembling victim, that in a minute more will be crunched, body and bones, by the cruel gripe of her sharp teeth. To all outward appearance, Lady Livingston was fully reconciled to the impenitent prodigal whom she had known and distrusted so long ; but there was a half-humorous twinkle in the dowager's eye which was lost on the other members of the company, and which seemed to be suggested by some secret sense of enjoyment.

Once, as she stood beside the piano, turning over the leaves of a music-book, Dashwood contrived, unheard, to exchange a word or two with Violet Maybrook.

"You are not angry with me, Violet?" he said in a low voice ; "we ought not to quarrel, ought we?" And he took her hand in his ; but she snatched it from him, not petulantly, but with the steady resolve of an indignation too deep for words.

"Carry your attentions elsewhere," she

said bitterly ; " they may be valued there by one who has not learned to read you as I, to my sorrow, have done. You have begun well, and had better go on as you have begun. Go, Sir Frederick, to Miss Fleming's side, before we are observed."

" On my life, on my soul, Violet," the baronet returned earnestly, " you have no cause for anger, none. I have been acting a part, nothing more. You don't suppose I care a straw for the pretty baby-face yonder ! But the way to loosen the old woman's purse-strings is to be civil to my cousin Beatrice, whom she thinks perfection, and so——"

Violet interrupted him fiercely. " And so you would have no objection to a rich bride, whose dower would free you from your debts ; and the old lady is capricious, and Beatrice gentle and weak-willed ; and all would go smoothly on, were it not for her whom you now insult by paying court to another before her eyes. Beware, Sir

Frederick Dashwood, how you make an enemy of me!"

And the next moment she was seated at the piano, singing, in the richest tones of her sweet clear voice, one of those Canadian-French boat-songs which Dashwood had heard, many a time, among people and scenes now far away. Her passionate anger merely served to add a charm and a pathos to her accents as they rang through the room, and she looked royally beautiful as she rose to receive, with becoming meekness, the praise of her scanty audience.

"After *that*," said Beatrice, laughing, "I shall sing no more. My poor little ditties would be ashamed to make themselves audible after Miss Maybrook's performance."

It was late when Dashwood left the house to return to London, and, as he passed down the carriage drive, in the clear air of a frosty night, with the starlit sky above his head, he lingered for a moment or two,

and looked up at the mansion that he had just quitted.

"I wonder," he said softly, "which of those lighted windows is that of *her* room? Pshaw! What on earth does it matter? A pretty fellow am I, indeed, to be spooning about here like a love-sick Romeo; and yet, by Jove! I feel to-night as if I could have been fool enough to marry that girl outright, if she would have me. Queer, that I should prize her more, now that she is scornful, hostile, almost, than when she took every word I said as truth and law, out yonder. But I should grow tired of her in a week, and, what is more to the purpose, I cannot afford it. So I must chuck sentiment over, and stick to business."

Still, as Frederick Dashwood, baronet of the United Kingdom, and still (thanks to the dilatory proceedings of Cutts and Spatterdash, the well-known army agents, whose incoming client boggled at the heavy

over-regulation price which their outgoing customer demanded) a captain in Her Majesty's army, walked towards the railway station, he thought more of Violet Maybrook than he had done since they parted on the platform of the London terminus, after their landing from the Canadian homeward-bound packet which had brought them to Liverpool. It was with some regret, and almost a touch of compunction, that he thought of her, and of the gradual change which had been worked in her. When first they met, she had been a bright, clever, high-spirited girl ; and now she was a woman, fierce, vindictive, reticent of counsel, sensitive to wrong.

“ Not the sort of lady-love to be lightly cast off ; ” thus ran the thread of his meditations ; “ and yet, in the Fiend's name, what can she do ? To hurt me, she must harm herself—not that such a consideration would stop her,” he added ruefully, and this time aloud, “ if once her mind were



fairly bent on vengeance. And yet, who knows? There is a soft spot in the hearts of almost all women, when it comes to the point of settling scores with the man who has injured them. I'll risk it—must risk it. The Jews could sell me up any morning, and I am as ill off as the fellow in the fable—Damocles, wasn't he?—with the sword hanging over his head by night and day. And yet, if Violet and Beatrice were a brace of heiresses, I'd not hesitate long as to which I would choose for my partner in life. The dowager's money-bags overweight the scale."

Thus brooding over the necessity and the precariousness of his position, he reached the station in time to be a passenger by the last townward train. And as that train rushed on through the darkness, the peaceful stars serenely shining overhead, the trees, the hedges, and the house-roofs looming through the uncertain light, even the choicest of tobacco could not

soothe Sir Frederick into that condition of calm stolidity which is the privilege of a sound constitution and a callous conscience. It was one of those rare moments when the most reckless pause to look back, like a pilgrim who has gained some ridge along the mountain-road, at the worse than wasted life that lies behind them, and see, in the clear cold gray of the distant horizon, the opportunities lost for ever, the right path neglected for crooked ways, all that might have been, but which now can never be. Dashwood had schemed and striven, and he had had his will and his way. There had been a time when the baronetcy had seemed out of his reach, and when he could scarcely have hoped to inherit whatever his offended grandfather might have to leave. He was Sir Frederick now, and the very rank that he had once desired so ardently merely supplied him with an additional reason for grumbling at the fate which had decreed that he should be a titled pauper.

“ A precious mess I have made of it !”—  
such were his last reflections. “ And as  
for Violet, poor girl, it would have been  
better for both of us if our ways in life had  
always been apart.”

## CHAPTER X.

### THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.



LADY LIVINGSTON, though an imperious, was not a hard task-mistress to those beneath her domestic sway, and did not, as some employers do, regard her companion as a sentry never to be off duty, a sort of useful shadow, never to be too far separated from its proprietor. Hale and able-bodied, she did not stand in need of those small services which are so constantly exacted by opulent infirmity from youthful indigence, did not drop her handkerchief at one moment, mislay her spectacles at another, and periodi-

cally institute a quest in search of an invaluable bunch of keys (all the time reposing in the innermost recess of her own cavernous pocket), which entailed a game at hide-and-seek in every nook and corner of the house. The dowager readily agreed that Violet, who had been accustomed to much outdoor exercise and fresh air, should spend her leisure time in rambling about the grounds, or, indeed, elsewhere.

“Go into the town, if you like, my dear, and take one of the servants if you prefer it. You’ll not do it twice, I suspect. The shop-lads from London will stare at you, and you won’t care about the grocer’s two-and-ninepenny Moning—good tea cost a guinea a pound when I was a child, in the days of convoys and the old Honourable Company, but then it *was* tea—there is none now—or the linendraper’s ticketed goods, or the music-seller’s window, full of pictures of black men making themselves ridiculous. Nobody will tease you here, at

any rate, and you get the air twice as well on the terrace as in the streets."

Violet was on the terrace now, looking dreamily up the reaches of the river, steel-blue in the pale sun-gleams that fell through the broken clouds above, for now a fresh change of weather seemed imminent. The sky was covered by long filmy threads of white vapour, some gathered into skeins, as though newly twisted by the distaff of Norse Valkyr or Greek Destiny, some woven into webs fit to be the winding-sheet of a dead Titan. Still the stream ran down, and the narrow-leaved willows waved their gaunt arms, and the water rippled among the sedges and reeds that hid the pike and harboured the white armada of swans, as stream, willow, and wave had done before the glint of the Roman helmets and the flash of the Roman spears had scared the painted indwellers of British London.

"And this is England!" she murmured, scarce conscious that her thoughts had

shaped themselves into articulate sounds ;  
“ so like, yet so unlike, the Old Country of my girlish dreams. What have I found as yet ? A packhorse round of duties, a carking weight of care, the monotony of the cloister, unrelieved by the fervour of a willing sacrifice of self. Was it for this that I have done and dared so much, until the heart within my breast seems changed to very stone, and I can pray no more, weep no more, but must wait, and long with unsatisfied longing for what can never be mine ! To be in England, in wonderful, wealthy England, where power and splendour were the appanage of the high-born, or of such as could win their way upwards to the eminence on which the accident of birth had seated others, such was my wish. I am here, and in what am I the better for the change ? To be my lady—one of the titled few of whom I had read, even as a baronet's wife—was my ambition, and even that poor prize seems to be as far beyond my grasp

as the heaven that I shall never win. I might force him to marry me. The alternative is too dreadful for a luxurious Sybarite to defy, were it once but fairly put before him, with no loophole for subterfuge or escape; but in such a wedding, Hate would stand, ghostly, behind bride and bridegroom, and——”

She paused, and stood, with dilated eyes and lips half-parted, gazing with as much of startled eagerness as if she had in very truth beheld the grim Presence of which she spoke, incarnate before her. What she saw in reality was a girl of slender form and low stature, with colourless hair and pallid face, and cold keen eyes riveted on those of Violet, a girl whose attire was faultlessly neat, and of almost Quaker-like soberness as to shape and colour, and who had approached her so softly in the midst of her reverie, that a less lively imagination than that of Miss Maybrook might easily have conceived that she had risen out of



the earth, like the elf that she seemed to be. In short, the intruder was no other than the lodger whom Mrs. Gulp of Great Eldon Street knew by the name of Miss Davis, and whose brother was the pattern clerk of those very eminent solicitors, Goodeve and Glegg, of Bedford Row. The elf looked smilingly up in Violet's face, and made a quick fluttering movement forward, so like to the abrupt dart of a snake, that Lady Livingston's companion instinctively shrank back, though in the next instant an unwonted tinge of crimson rose to warm the creamy whiteness of her fair face, and she drew herself up to her full height, as if in scorn.

"To think that I should frighten you!" said the elf, with sportive malice: "you were not always so easy to alarm, Violet, love!"

"Nor am I alarmed now," answered Violet coldly; "nor is your coming, Miss Larpent, so absolute a surprise to me as

you appear to consider it. From the moment when I saw your brother arrive here, in attendance on his employer, I felt assured that you could not be far away. Now, frankly, what would you have of me? I know you too well to suppose that you have come here without wanting something, Miss Larpent."

"Call me Aphy," said the elf, in the prettiest tone of playful reproach: "why be so formal with your old playfellow and schoolmate! What have I done, Vi, that I should cease to be Aphy to you?"

"Dare you ask me!" burst out Violet, with a passionate indignation that made her voice quiver, as with flashing eyes she confronted the intruder. "Is it nothing that you have brought disgrace upon an honest name, and on kindred whose misfortune it was to be near to you? Is it nothing that your shame embittered the last days of your gray-haired father's life, and that he learned to be thankful that your mother

had not lived long enough to know her best-loved child for what she was! Is it nothing that your brother has gone forth from his native place with the brand of Cain upon his brow, made into a murderer by his stubborn fondness for a sister who merited so little sympathy! Is it nothing that you are yourself a wanderer, as guilty of yon poor wretch's violent death, as if your hand had held the weapon that sent him, with all his sins upon his head, to judgment! And now you come here"——

"And now I come here," interrupted the elf, with glittering eyes that had changed colour repeatedly during the course of Violet's speech, and in which there now shone a baleful green light, such as glows in those of the serpent as he lifts his head to strike—"and now I come here to have this unkind version of my story flung in my teeth so rudely, and that by an old friend like you, Vi. Do be careful, for your own sake, dearest. Take my advice, Violet

Maybrook, and don't forget that your own reminiscences should make you more charitable in your criticisms on your neighbours. You played the same game with Dashwood, yonder, as mine with Lovelace."

"I deny it!" flashed out Violet, towering above her almost dwarfish adversary, like a grand statue of Scorn: "there rests no stain on my name, or on my soul."

"No stain, Violet, darling!" sneered Miss Larpent, with one of those serpentine movements which made her pliant frame appear unnaturally supple, and with eyes that seemed to sparkle as with an unholy fire of awakened malignity. "It may be, in one sense, that you speak the truth, and at any rate your prudence or your luck has kept you from the breath of scandal; but yet you had best beware lest the true story of a certain bright spring day, far off in the woods of our own Canada, should ever ooze out. The worst that can be said of me has been told, and if many would con-

demn, some would pity me. But as for you——”

“Hush! hush! for the love of Heaven,” said Violet, hurriedly; and glancing quickly to left and right, as if in fear of eavesdroppers: “I cannot bear this. You take a cruel advantage of me, Aphy: but—but you are right after all. I have no claim to judge harshly of others.” And as she thus spoke, she wrung her hands with a slight but fearfully expressive gesture, and then allowed her arms to fall passively down by her side, as she stood slightly bending forward, as one who had striven against fate, and has been vanquished.

“I thought,” said the elf triumphantly, “that you would hear reason by-and-by, Violet, love! And now to business.”

“Business; ah, yes! I had forgotten that,” returned Miss Maybrook, without any change of attitude. “You want something of me, or you would not be here.”

“Of course I want something,” com-

posedly answered she who has hitherto been known by the strange name of Aphy : "every one does, so far as I know. And my present want is a very old and common one—money."

"I have very little of that," said Violet, almost eagerly, as she drew forth her purse ; "but if that little can be of any service, you shall be welcome to the use of it."

"Thank you ; no !" answered her former friend demurely : "your finances, Vi, are scarcely worth poaching upon. But, if you are not the rose of aristocracy, you are near enough to it to imbibe its perfume, which is wealth. You live, metaphorically, in the lap of luxury. You are the daily and hourly companion of grand folks, who would hesitate to allow their garments to brush against mine, should we meet by accident. The employer whom you serve is rich and whimsical ; that much I know. The man who promised to marry you—his brother officer promised to marry me, and

you remember the result—is at least a baronet, and has some sort of bemuddled fortune. Bruce and I are poor, Vi, dear. He has his wretched pay as a clerk, and the few weekly shillings that I earn by teaching do not greatly swell the stock. In this strait, I naturally remember that I have a friend in you, Violet, a friend who cannot refuse my petition.” The last words were uttered fawningly, but with a malicious emphasis that was not thrown away upon the hearer.

“What can I do?” said Violet wearily : “my position here scarcely entitles me to—beg. Anything beyond a small sum Lady Livingston would probably deny me. As for my salary——”

“Once again, I have no designs upon your pittance of salary,” tartly broke in the elf : “nor just at present, Vi, do I urge you to make a raid on the dowager’s purse. What would seem to her ladyship as a magnificent donation, five pounds—or, in

case of marvellous liberality, ten—to a “deserving object,” would but stave off the evil hour of sheer destitution for some few days more. No ; it is to Sir Frederick that I would have you apply.”

“And to what good purpose ?” pleaded Violet, with averted face. “You, who know so much, must be aware that he is crippled by debts and beset by creditors ; that he is a desperate and broken man, growing daily more and more callous and reckless ; and that he treats me with neglect, now that he is at home again among his early associates. Of what avail would my request be, were I to humble myself so far as to proffer it !”

“You underrate your influence, dear Violet,” said Miss Larpent with a mocking laugh. “It is not to his affections that you should appeal, but to his selfish fears. You know as well as I do, that he cannot refuse you a boon which it may be in his power to grant. And there are always pick-



ings to be found among the rags and relics of a ruined fortune. Those only are really poor who never had a chance of being what the world calls "broken down." Sir Frederick will growl and show his teeth I doubt not, but he will presently recognize the truth, that discretion is the wisest policy for such as he is. Come, I will be moderate, but there must be no delays. In three days at farthest, I shall expect to receive as many hundred pounds. Silence is a marketable commodity, and worth its price."

Violet shook her head. "I have scanty hopes," "she answered; but I will try to arrange matters as you wish."

"Do so, like a dear, dear old friend," replied the elf, with a sprightly buoyancy of tone and manner that made her resemblance to a malevolent fairy even more striking than before. "Nor need I recommend secrecy. For your own sake you will be mute. So, now, I must go, before

my presence attracts the attention of some member of my lady's household. I am a trespasser here, you must know ; and had not the gardener fortunately left the wicket-gate unfastened, yonder, by the river-bank, I should not have reached your presence without provoking remark and inquiry. Here"—and as she spoke she thrust into Violet's hand a card on which some words were written—"is my address in London. Bring the money, or let Sir Frederick bring it, as you choose, but remember the three days—for I grant no further grace. Now, one thing more, and then I vanish like a ghost at cockcrow. Kiss me, Violet!" And the little creature opened her lithe arms and lifted her face, as waiting for the embrace of her former friend. Slowly, and as if under the overmastering influence of some magic spell, did Violet bow down her stately head and press her lips to Miss Larpent's sallow cheek, shuddering the while, as if she had touched the slimy skin of an

actual snake. Nor could the eye of the fellest reptile that ever haunted the long grass of an Indian jungle glitter with a more intense expression of exultant malignity, than did those colourless ones of Miss Larpent's, as they looked up at Violet when that enforced caress had been duly paid.

"Now, farewell ; but remember !" she said, and then was gone.

But Violet stood motionless on the terrace long after her unwelcome visitant had left her, nor could a sculptor have desired a fairer model, had he dreamed of moulding a statue of Despair. A pagan of old days might have believed her to be one who had met, face to face, with Medusa's self, and to be stiffening into stone under the potency of the Gorgon glance. At last, with a faint low sigh, she stirred, and as the light of a re-awakened intelligence came back into her eyes, she drew herself up, and for a moment gazed

around her with all the scornful anger of an insulted queen.

"It begins, then, in this world—the doom of the lost ones," she murmured so faintly, that the sound of her voice reached her own ear but as a whisper from afar off; "and mine has not tarried long. And she—yonder viper—has defied me, humbled me, forced me to own that I hold my place in the world, such as it is, on the frail tenure of her greed and her caprice, and she has left me—uncrushed!" She raised her arms as she spoke, and let them drop again, repeating, unconsciously, the gesture by which she had expressed the utter helplessness of a proud spirit to cope with some resistless force that will not be gainsaid. Then, without a word more, she walked slowly back towards the house.

Violet's duty of reading aloud to the dowager, a task which she executed after dinner on most days, was but badly fulfilled on that which had witnessed her interview

with Miss Larpent. Her voice, usually so clear and musical, was now so unsteady and indistinct, that Lady Livingston, who had that all-devouring interest in fiction which we sometimes notice in the survivors of a bygone generation, became for the first time dissatisfied with the conduct of her dependent.

"There, there, child," she said angrily; "put the book down, please, if you can read no better than that. It's a novel that I'm quite absorbed in, and you've tried my patience beyond bearing for the last ten minutes, so that I have completely lost the thread of the heroine's speech, and don't know what the villain is driving at. I never remember you to have been so absent as you seem to-night."

Beatrice Fleming smiled as she offered to read the remainder of the chapter in Miss Maybrook's stead, and indeed neither of the girls thought much of the petulance of the old lady, who was accustomed to say


of herself that her bark was by far more formidable than her bite, and whose chiding was commonly softened by the quaint sense of humour which rarely deserted her. But Beatrice could not but observe how pale and grave her kinswoman's companion had become, and how evident was the effort by which she kept her thoughts from wandering, as she went through her habitual routine of duty.

"I thought Miss Maybrook was ill to-day," she said on parting for the night with Lady Livingston; "her hand was very cold and her mind seemed to be pre-occupied."

"Nonsense!" returned the dowager: "she was a little careless and dull, that's all—moped, I suppose, in this stupid house, where I can't allow you, dear, to stay much longer. But you see that I scolded her, and she brightened up wonderfully after that."

## CHAPTER XI.

BY THE BOATHOUSE.

“OME down at once, dear Frederick. Lose no time. Meet me at the boathouse by the river, to-morrow, at two. Lose not a moment. What you know of has come to light. Do not fail me. Come at once.—V. M.”

The note was addressed to Sir Frederick Dashwood.

Strange to say, Violet Maybrook, in her own room, had spent two hours in composing this apparently simple and unstudied document, surrounded as she was by torn fragments of letter-paper, on each

of which had been traced a few lines, written only to be condemned before the ink was dry. The style of some of these inchoate epistles varied very much. Some were proud, curt, and cold ; others breathed fond words of love, never destined to reach the hands of him for whom they were designed. At length, and after many failures, Violet wrote, directed, and sealed her letter ; and in the cold gray of early morning she carried it herself to the post-office. The day was yet young, the metropolitan deliveries are frequent enough to insure Dashwood's prompt receipt of the missive, she could not doubt that he would obey her summons.

The weather being still fine, with frequent sunshine and filmy cloud-streaks to mottle the pale blue sky, it was probable that Lady Livingston would take her accustomed carriage-exercise at three o'clock, accompanied as usual by Miss Maybrook, and hence the choice of two, as the hour



most convenient for a meeting between Violet and Sir Frederick. The attendance of the former on her titled employer was not very close, and she anticipated no difficulty in leaving the house unquestioned and unseen, to keep her appointment with the baronet. All combinations, however, that relate to human conduct are liable to be disturbed by some unexpected action on the part of another, and so it proved in this instance, since it was the dowager's fancy to order her carriage full an hour earlier than usual, and to notify the fact to Violet. Whatever might have been the faults in Miss Maybrook's nature, she was at least superior to the petty artifices congenial to some dispositions, and it was with strong repugnance and keen self-reproach that she schooled her proud and passionate soul to dissemble. She was ill, she said at length, faint and giddy, and must ask Lady Livingston to excuse her for being unequal to accompanying her during her

drive. It was nothing, a mere trifle, and would soon pass away ; but if the dowager pleased, Violet would go to her room and lie down for awhile.

“ I don’t like companions who are always ill,” said the mistress of the Fountains, drumming with her foot upon the silken footstool, so soon as the door had closed on Violet. “ One invalid in a house is enough, I should say. Miss Maybrook was just what I could wish, until last night, but now she seems quite altered. It’s all very well, Beatrice dear, for you to volunteer to drive out with me in her stead, and I’m too selfish to say no ; but it is intolerable that you should be boxed up in a chariot, and bowled along a dull road that you don’t care about, merely because this girl has the fancies of a fine lady. Nerves, I suppose ! I don’t know, I declare, what the world is coming to. I presume Molly the housemaid will be troubled with nerves presently. When I was young, nobody had such things,

except ladies of quality and rich old maids. It is abominably inconsiderate, on the part of Miss Maybrook, and I shall take care that she knows my opinion."

Having uttered which severe remarks with a becoming austerity, the dowager summoned Mrs. Hart the housekeeper, and bade her to administer wine, sal-volatile, or whatsoever cordial or anodyne her experience might suggest, and to pay all attention to the comfort of the culprit whom she had just been denouncing. And before starting for her early drive, she went herself to Violet's darkened chamber, and spoke to its lonely occupant almost as tenderly as she would have done to her own daughter. But Miss Maybrook would have nothing, not even the solace of a fire. Sleep and quiet were all that she wished for, and Mrs. Hart's suggestions were all met with a gentle negative. Wherefore the dowager came downstairs grumbling at the inconsiderate behaviour of her new companion.

in falling ill, and, with Beatrice, started for her drive.

“I think, if I could sleep, it would do me good. I need not trouble you any more; Mrs. Hart, thank you,” said Violet, and the housekeeper, with her jingling keys and rustling raiment, at length retired, and left Miss Maybrook free to act. It is no easy matter, in most cases, to quit a large house, well garrisoned by servants, unperceived. And Violet well knew the risk which she was forced to run, and was aware that for the seeming invalid of half an hour ago to be seen abroad would be sufficient to attract towards her the fatal curiosity of the domestics, a curiosity Argus-eyed, and as full of tongues as Rumour itself. As yet, she was not unpopular with the household, in spite of the increasing favour with which she was viewed by their noble mistress, but then she had been very wary to give no vantage-ground to malicious gossiping. Violet divined, rather than knew,

that the old saying, "A favourite has no friend," would approve itself true in her case, should she lay herself open to reproach on the part of her inferiors in station. She had to wait, then, till the coast should be clear, and until she was pretty well assured that the part of the house in which her chamber was situated was free from the presence of Mrs. Hart and her subordinates in cap and apron. She did wait, with a beating heart and clenched hands, hearkening to the ticking of the French clock on her chimney-piece. It was now long past two, and she might surely, nay, most surely, incur the venture.

The Fountains, like most eighteenth century mansions, was more liberally provided with back-stairs, passages, and side-doors, than are the houses of similar pretensions, but of later date. There was a seldom-used staircase, as Violet well knew, leading down from the upper portion of the west wing to a corridor on the ground-

floor, whence a glass-door, barred with iron, as a precaution against burglars, gave egress to the flower-garden, and permitted an inmate of the dwelling to emerge into the outer air with fair prospect of being wholly unobserved. Hastily attiring herself, Violet softly opened the door of her room, satisfied herself that no prying eye was upon her, then closing the door, she locked it on the outside, and, carrying the key with her, made the best of her way down the narrow and carpetless stairs, along the white-washed passage, and through the garden-door, the bolts of which, as she had expected, yielded readily to her touch, while the key, red with rust, stood stiffly rooted in the corroded lock, as it had done for years. Her plans were carefully laid. She had not failed to mark whereabouts, at that hour, the gardeners would be employed, and this part of the pleasure-grounds she heedfully avoided, gliding from tree to tree, and from one thicket of shrubs to another,

with the stealthy caution of the Indian hunter of her native woods, and preferring a long circuit to any shortening of her road which might expose her to unfriendly scrutiny from the windows. The chances were against the housekeeper's return to the room which Violet had left tenantless ; but should such an event occur, the locked door would prove an effectual barrier, and Mrs. Hart, after a cautious tap or two, would conclude the occupant of the chamber to be asleep, and would naturally withdraw. Lady Livingston was by this time miles away. There would be time to get through the interview with Dashwood, and to regain the room in the west wing, before the dowager should order her horses' heads to be turned towards home.

The boathouse belonging to the Fountains stood beside a tiny creek opening on the Thames, and outside the gardens. It was, like many of its congeners, a roomy, low building, in what is called rustic wood-

work, roughly composed of timber with the bark on it, and with an overhanging roof of thatch. It contained boats which were in requisition, at most, some three or four times in the year, when the dowager entertained her fashionable friends from London at a lawn-party, and for the rest of the twelvemonth appeared to exist for the benefit of a superannuated waterman, who derived a snug annuity from the light duty of keeping this miniature flotilla in good repair and trim condition. There was a lane that led from the public road to the river-side at this point, but it was very little frequented, while the angle of the boathouse formed a screen that prevented those who stood beneath it from being visible from the stream itself. The same garden-wicket which had given the means of admittance to Miss Larpent, and which was always unlocked by day, allowed Violet to quit the grounds without trouble.

She found Dashwood angrily pacing to



and fro, gnawing his tawny moustache as he did so.

“So here you are at last,” he said roughly, and without lifting his hat or offering his hand. “Half an hour and more have I had to stand sentry, kicking my heels beside this confounded shed, and all because it is your fancy to send me some absurd directions to hurry down here, post-haste, as if life and death depended on it. On my word, you take it coolly, Violet. My time is of value to myself, I assure you, in the present precious state of my affairs, whatever it may be to you.”

“You are uncivil, Sir Frederick,” said Violet, with a contemptuous curl of the lip; “and not merely rude, but rash also. In whatever fashion you may employ your time, rest assured that the portion of it which you have spent in obeying my summons has not been the most unprofitably spent.”

There was something in her tone and

bearing which enforced his attention, and he gazed at her fixedly.

“ You look anxious and harassed, Violet,” he said in more subdued accents ; “ I begin to think that you really have something to say to me. I was half afraid to tell you the truth, that you only wanted me to run down that you might reproach me, as you did the other day. It cuts a fellow up, my dear, more than you can guess, to find himself treated like a dog by the woman he loves.”

And as he spoke, he tried to take her hand, but she repulsed him.

“ There was a time, Fred,” she answered, “ when even those few half-careless words that you have just uttered would have been as music to me, something to be treasured and gloried in, as a miser hugs his hoarded gold ; but I have grown older and wiser now, and you have taught me much. Suffice it that I did *not* send for you to reproach you with any part of your

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enough to believe that there was a heart to  
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expense."

And he did laugh, but the unnatural  
sound grated on his ear, and caused him to  
look upon her with renewed anxiety.

"I don't like to see you in this mood,  
Violet," he rejoined earnestly: "nor do I  
think I have quite deserved it. I'm not a  
very good fellow, I know that well enough,  
but when you say I never loved you, you  
do me injustice. I know I have not  
kept my word—about the marriage and  
that—but, Vi, a man with a millstone of  
debt hung about his neck, ought to have a  
little patience shown to him. Set me up  
with five thousand a year, three—two, even  
and I never thought the governor could  
have had less to leave—and I would only

be too proud to take Violet, Lady Dashwood, on my arm into any small drawing-room in London. It's my poverty, and not my will, as the fellow says in the play."

How is it that an habitual liar can contrive, now and again, to have some true statement accepted as worthy of credence, even by those who know him the best? By what subtle test of the intellect do we learn to distinguish the ring of the true gold from the chink of spurious metal, and feel a just assurance that we are not deceived this once, even though the lips that have spoken be on other occasions as utterly untrustworthy? Nobody, not Dashwood himself, was so familiar with the worst side of the baronet's character as was Miss Maybrook. She knew him, and scorned him, and yet, now that he stood before her, she felt, by some unerring intuition, that in that moment of emotion he had uttered the literal truth. Scorn, doubt, anger, were all for the

treatment of myself. When you promised me your hand, I really was credulous enough to believe that there was a heart to go along with it. How you must have laughed at my simplicity! I could almost share in your merriment, though at my own expense."

And she did laugh, but the unnatural sound grated on his ear, and caused him to look upon her with renewed anxiety.

"I don't like to see you in this mood, Violet," he rejoined, earnestly; "nor do I think I have quite deserved it. I'm not a very good fellow, I know that well enough, but when you say I never loved you, you do me injustice. I know I have not kept my word—about the marriage and that—but, Vi, a man with a millstone of debt hung about his neck, ought to have a little patience shown to him. Set me up with five thousand a year, three—two, even—and I never thought the governor could have had less to leave—and I would only

be too proud to take Violet, Lady Dashwood, on my arm into any small drawing-room in London. It's my poverty, and not my will, as the fellow says in the play."

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instant swept away before the rising flood of passionate feeling, and, hardly knowing what she did, she threw her arms round Sir Frederick's neck, and kissed him repeatedly, while her tears fell like rain.

"My own again!" she exclaimed; "bought so dearly, not to be lost—my love, my love, my love!"

This sudden outburst of resistless love and tenderness, that contempt itself had failed to kill, on the part of one so proud as was Violet, was not quite thrown away upon him to whom it was addressed. Dashwood's hard heart, indurated by years of unchecked selfishness and self-indulgent unscrupulousness, softened for a minute. He drew the weeping girl closer to him, and so held her, with his powerful arm around her waist.

"Poor little Vi!" was all he said, but the unwonted gentleness of his voice lent a charm to the words that made them eloquent to Violet, and she clung to him, sobbing.

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"We ought to be true to one another, you and I, Fred," she murmured; "we, who have all the world against us."

He was kind and patient, nay, even gracious, with her as she nestled by his side, with her soft caresses and words of endearment, to which her lips had long been unused, though they had been frequent during the earlier part of their acquaintance beyond seas. The capacity of loving was not great in Sir Frederick Dashwood, who had been a rake from his boyish days, and who had no very exalted estimate of the feminine character at any time. Yet he was proud, after a fashion, to be loved by such a one as Miss Maybrook, with all her beauty and courage and cleverness; and a hazy kind of pity rose up within him as for a moment he ceased to concentrate his thoughts upon himself, and remembered her forlorn condition and her baffled hopes.

"I do love you, Vi, my dear; never



doubt it !” he said, stooping his head to kiss her ; and as he spoke, he felt a sharp thrill of remorse, such as seldom awakened his seared conscience, as that inward monitor whispered to him, that to-morrow he would marry another woman for her money’s sake, if only he could ; and that he would never hesitate for an instant between Violet’s happiness and his own ease.

Presently, after a long time, Violet seemed to arouse herself from the sweet dream of loving and being loved, and she gently but firmly released herself from Dashwood’s encircling arm.

“ I have been silly, Fred, dear,” she said, as she shook the tear-drops from her eyes, and stood erect and resolute before the baronet ; “ silly in my gladness that you had still a little thought for Violet Maybrook. It was not for this that I summoned you ; it was not for this that I have stolen, like a thief, from the house where I am believed—to such subterfuge have I been

forced to stoop—to be lying ill. There is danger !”

“Real danger ?” said Sir Frederick, with a slight change of colour. “You would hardly be alarmed at a trifle, Violet, unless you are greatly altered.”

“Very real, very near, very pressing,” said Violet, with a deliberation that added weight to what she said. “I have had a visitor here—an old acquaintance of yours and mine.”

“A visitor,” rejoined Dashwood, knitting his brows thoughtfully ; “and from Canada, of all places on this earth ! Not that murdering fellow—not young Larpent—for *he* is in London, as I happen to know ?”

“Not Bruce,” replied Violet, gravely : “his coming, if it had boded little good, might not in itself have been a portent of evil. No ! You remember his sister, Aphy ?”

“His sister ? To be sure I do ; and with some reason,” said Dashwood, stroking his heavy moustache. “Wasn’t I arm

in arm with Lovelace, poor lad, when that pretty business happened at the skating-rink! It was I who took the young fellow prisoner, with the smoking pistol yet in his hand, and a sharp tussle we had for it before I got him disarmed and down. Not, to do him justice, that he bore me any grudge for that, since I remember that when I gave evidence against him in court, and he was acquitted, he leant over the edge of the dock and offered his hand to me—but I couldn't take it, much obliged to him, because of poor Jack!"

Sir Frederick looked down for a moment, and his lip quivered a very little. Perhaps he was thinking, as he recalled the memory of the dead man, his very dear friend, how far his own pernicious counsel had helped him along the devious road that had led to so ghastly an ending. He was not, however, much given to the sentimental mood, and his voice was quite steady and almost scornful as he went on.

“And so his sister, the fair Helen of that affair—not that her looks were anything to boast of—is in England, is she, and has been here? I remember. A little sallow creature, limber as an eel, and with eyes that made a man feel awkward when she looked at him; sang like a skylark, though, and danced admirably. Aphy—Aphrodite—what was her real name?”

“Her name was Aphrodite Larpent,” answered Violet. “You must have heard, in Montreal, how she came to bear it. Her mother, a very foolish, half-educated woman, lighted on the name in some printed book, and insisted on her bearing it. The father was away, called off on business to Quebec; and the minister, who ought to have known better, never remonstrated, so that the poor girl grew up the lawful wearer of what was worse than a nickname.”

"And so, after I forget how many hundred or thousand years Aphrodite came to be christened," said Dashwood, yawning. "I never liked her, and what Lovelace saw—— But that is not worth talking of at this time of day. The essential is, what does she want?"

"What every one wants—money—three hundred pounds, as the price of her silence," answered Violet, seriously.

Dashwood laughed incredulously as he rattled the bunch of glittering charms on his watchguard.

"She is a clever minx," he said; "but she'll be cleverer than I take her for if she gets three hundred pounds out of *me*. Three hundred! She might just as well ask me to liquidate the national debt, that's all."

"Listen to me, Fred," said Violet, impressively. "I know that you are poor, dear, and pressed on all hands, and in endless troubles about money. But she—

Aphy—is no common creditor, to be put off with excuses or fair words. How you are to obtain this sum—which seems large to her and to me, with our homely habits, but which to you must appear trifling—I must leave to yourself. I only warn you, that within three days the wages of her silence must be paid, unless we are both prepared to face the worst that can be endured.”

“What does she know?” asked Dashwood, biting his lip savagely.

“All!” answered Violet, and her lips became quite white as she uttered the word.

“Ah!” exclaimed Sir Frederick, stamping his boot-heel into the weed-grown earth beneath his feet. “I can’t congratulate you on your choice of a confidante.”

“She was none!” returned Violet, eagerly laying her hand upon his arm. “We were companions at school and play, but friends never. Nay, I had often a

lurking fancy that Aphy hated me. Do you not remember that I told you of some one—or rather two persons—who were in the forest on a certain day in spring—you know the date as well as I—but of whose discretion I felt assured? Those two were Aphy Larpent and her brother Bruce. It was the first whose eyes watched, when——”

“Hush! who can tell what ears may be near!” interrupted Dashwood, nervously. “She wants to be bought off, then,” he added, with a groan; “and yet to sponge on me for ready cash, is like trying to get blood from a stone. You don’t know, Violet, how miserable I am, or to what straits I am reduced. I have to fling my silver about, and make small bets, and share in the petty extravagances of men of my station, merely to keep a good face on the matter, and prevent the world from saying that Dashing Dashwood is utterly bowled out; and yet I know I ought to hoard up every half-crown that I toss to a

cabman or a waiter. I'm in debt to my servants, my laundress, my very baker, I believe. The lawyers give me cold comfort when I beat up their musty quarters. Half the men I used to know cross the street when they see me coming, afraid, I suppose, of some design upon their pockets. Youngsters about town, who, when first they showed their foolish faces in Pall Mall, would have paid pretty smartly for the credit of being seen hand-in-glove with Fred Dashwood of the old regiment, now shirk me as if I were a dun. There's an atmosphere of misfortune that attaches itself to a man broken down as I am, and if, like the scent of carrion, it allures the vultures that prey on ruined wretches, it scares off those who would have been the first to hold out the hand of good-fellowship, had a fat legacy dropped in."

At that moment the dull, but fast approaching roll of wheels struck upon Violet's quick ear. She turned her head,



and saw with dismay the well-known gray horses pass the head of the narrow lane, and close following at their heels, the yellow chariot with the coronet panels and the coroneted hammercloth, and, doubtless, as inside passengers, the dowager and Miss Fleming.

“That is Lady Livingston — back already. The same ill luck pursues us!” the girl hurriedly exclaimed. “Here is Aphy Larpent’s address. I must go.” And before Sir Frederick could glance at the card that was thrust into his hand, she had sprung forward and kissed him again, this time with a sort of despairing eagerness, and was gone like a vision of the night. He caught one glimpse of her as she darted through the garden-gate, and then the trees concealed her. Sullenly, and with many feelings warring in his breast, he made his way back to London.

Lady Livingston’s early return from her customary drive was due to no fickleness of

purpose. The day was fine, the roads in excellent condition, and the dowager would, in the normal course of things, have carried out her original intentions, but illness, genuine enough, had laid its grasp upon her, and instinctively she yielded to the warning touch.

“I feel strangely tired, my dear,” she said, “and there is an odd sensation, too, about the heart, such as I don’t remember to have—— Never mind; it will be nothing,” continued the sturdy old lady; “and you need not speak and look, Beatrice, as if I were ready to be measured for my coffin. Only, I will thank you, my love, just to pull the check-string, and give the word ‘Home.’”

The dowager, during the remainder of the drive, was very white and silent, leaning heavily back in her corner of the roomy vehicle, but she uttered no complaint; and the few words which she did speak were derisive of the evident alarm

which her young ward and kinswoman entertained on her behalf. As, however, the carriage, drawing near to the Fountains, passed the lane that led down to the river, Lady Livingston, who had been steadfastly gazing out through the window nearest to her, suddenly exclaimed: "See, look! Beatrice; that must be Miss Maybrook, yonder by the boathouse, with somebody!"

And Beatrice, as her eyes sought the direction indicated, was also convinced, not merely that the female figure which she beheld was that of Violet, but that her masculine companion was no other than her own cousin, Sir Frederick Dashwood.

"I think it was Miss Maybrook," she said, hesitatingly, as the carriage swept on towards the lodge-gates; "at least, it was strikingly like her."

The dowager, in the excitement of the recognition, had quite shaken off all signs of suffering. "Strikingly like—yes, very," she muttered, with an ominous tightening

of the lips, and a portentous contraction of her bushy eyebrows. "A pretty trick, this, to feign illness, and then steal out to meet a lover so soon as my back is turned. If this be so, she will find that the old cat—as no doubt she calls me to her Lothario yonder—has claws. I forgive anything but treachery."

Beatrice Fleming, whose gentle nature led her to find excuses for the supposed culprit, tried to interpose a word between the offender and the wrath which she had provoked. "It was a long way off, dear Lady Livingston, and we had, you must remember, only a moment, before those persons, whoever they may have been, were out of sight. We may be deceived by a resemblance, after all."

"Very probable, I should say," answered the old lady, grimly. "But we shall get at the truth, I dare say, for here we are at home. How stupid of Peters to have shut the gate; and here the dawdling old

creature, his wife, keeps us] waiting, as if she did not know I was out for a drive."

Now, in strict justice, this blame was undeserved by both the superannuated servants who earned an easy livelihood as janitors at the Fountains. It was indeed an established rule that the gates were to be kept closed, for the exclusion of beery excursionists, who were apt to break boughs and pluck flowers as they went by; and Mrs. Peters had come with all reasonable promptitude to give ingress to her mistress. But Lady Livingston, eager to confront the truant dependent, whom she imagined to have practised on her credulity, felt as if the plump gray horses had never gone so slowly; as if the footman had never been so tediously inactive in swinging himself from the rumble, and in letting down the clattering steps; and as if every one around her were in league to impede her investigations and to screen the guilty. Once in the hall, she hurried

upstairs, at a pace which amazed the domestics, unused to such agility on the part of their valetudinarian mistress, and made the best of her way direct to the west wing, and to Miss Maybrook's room.

"Come with me, child," she had said to Beatrice, on whose arm, however, she refused to lean, as she hastened on. "She will be rather surprised," said the dowager, "to find me waiting for her, when she tears herself away from her stolen interview yonder."

And without further ceremony than a peremptory tap against the woodwork, she threw open the door. The room, at first, appeared so dark by contrast with the day without, that neither Beatrice nor Lady Livingston could distinguish whether or not the chamber was tenanted. Presently, as their eyes grew more accustomed to the dim light that filtered through between the heavy window-curtains, they beheld a sight which staggered their faith in the evidence

of their own senses. There, on the bed, half-covered by shawls, lay Violet, just as they had left her, and in the same attitude, with her beautiful head pillowed on one arm, and a tress of dark hair disarranged and falling loosely over her cheek. Quite quiet and motionless she lay, as if asleep, and there was nothing, which Lady Livingston's peering eyes could detect, changed since her last visit to her companion's room. And yet, how few were the instants since Violet, traversing the grounds with the speed of some hunted animal, to whose feet the anguish of imminent peril lends a frenzied swiftness, had darted, unseen, up the stairs that led to the garden, had, unseen, regained her chamber, and tearing off the hat and velvet walking-jacket which she wore, had flung herself on the bed, where she lay crouched like the weary hare among the fern, when spent with fierce exertion in the long effort to escape the coming hounds! But she

played her part so well, that quick and wildly as her heart was beating, her awakening, as the dowager stood beside her couch, was so natural, that the old peeress grew ashamed of her suspicions.


"You feel better now, my dear," she said, half gruffly, half in kindness; and then added: "but your hand is burning hot, poor child, though you lie here, on this cold day, without a fire. I don't want to frighten you, but you had better see some one. There's Dr. Eccles—he doesn't understand my constitution, but he may yours."

But Dr. Eccles, when summoned, agreed with Miss Maybrook that the latter's indisposition was trifling; she was a little feverish, but that was all. Nevertheless, Beatrice, though she kept her conviction to herself, was none the less assured that the man whom she had seen was Sir Frederick Dashwood, and that Violet had been at his side.



## CHAPTER XII.

### DOING BUSINESS WITH THE BEHEMOTH.

“OU are cornered, Fred. No use in mincing matters about it, my dear boy! You are in the Behemoth's hands, and must just try to make the best of the unhandsome hole in which bad luck has landed you.” So said, between the lazy puffs of his cigar, Major Raffington, who belonged to the “Flag Club,” and was indeed a committee-man of that institution, in the smoking-room of which the above oracular words were delivered. It was early in the day, one of those lazy hours of the forenoon which the

most inveterate idler finds it hard to kill, and Dashwood and the major were the sole occupants of that apartment, sacred to nicotine. The latter warrior was by four or five years the older of the two, if there be faith in Debrett and in the more prosaic parish register ; but to judge by the wrinkles on his face and the mottled tints of his complexion, Major Raffington was a perfect Nestor in comparison with the still handsome baronet. That his experience was considerable, was matter of notoriety. "Old Raff knows a thing or two," was the verdict of the junior members of the military club, and as the words were generally coupled with a wink or smile, intended to be profoundly significant, it may be conjectured that the "thing or two" pertained to the shadier arcana of London life.

There are men who through life contrive to pick their way through muddy places without being visibly bespattered by the mire that adheres to the less prudent,

and Major Raffington was one of those men. No one had ever heard of his possessing any property in particular, and yet he had lived on the fat of the land from infancy upwards, and was never heard to complain of insufficiency of means. An astonishing number of gentlemen successively fail to attain the rank of field-officer, sell out, more for the benefit of their creditors than of themselves, and are shelved thenceforth as captains by courtesy. But Raffington had done better for himself, and was now a major unattached, still drawing pay from the national exchequer, although what he had ever done to merit his position as a pensioner of confiding Britannia, was an enigma which cold-blooded utilitarians found difficult of solution. The pay of a major of infantry, unattached, did not, however, in Raffington's opinion, suffice for his maintenance, and the "private means," of which he was wont negligently to speak at times, being

a mystery to the veriest busy-bodies of his club, he was popularly reported to provide for his wants by somewhat dubious industries. Jackal to a money-lender, hanger-on to a great racing-stable, volunteer bear-leader to any young cub of fashion who was willing to part freely with his cash in return for the good offices of an Asmodeus who expected his Cleophas not to prove close-fisted ; the major managed to make both ends meet, and with something to spare, at the termination of the year. What he did with his savings, if such he possessed, nobody knew. He was a man who never lent a shilling, dined luxuriously at the expense of other people, perhaps three hundred days in the twelvemonth, and when he played at whist, generally rose a winner. Men said that " Raff " was a deep dog, and it is certain that he was not over-communicative about his personal affairs, though he received the confidences of many.

"Of course I am cornered; I know that well enough, without your telling me so," was Dashwood's half-savage retort. "I declare that some of you fellows really seem to roll out your words as if you luxuriated in them when you are on the theme of another man's ruin. You tell him he's up a tree, and under a cloud, and the rest of it, when the poor devil only asks a helping hand to get clear of the plight that he sees more clearly than any one else can do."

"Something to enjoy, eh, in the misfortunes of our best friends?" composedly chimed in the major. "I don't know whether you have read Rochefoucauld, or whether you are misquoting him intuitively, as Monsieur Jourdain talked prose without knowing it. There—there, old boy, I see you are in no humour for chaffing, and indeed I'm not very literary myself, though I do dip into a book now and then, for the sake of the dinner-parties. A little bit of read-

ing helps a man over many a conversational stile, at least with women. And now to business. First of all, the Behemoth has bought up all your loose kites, and holds every attainable bit of stamped paper signed by Frederick Dashwood. There's not a doubt of that."

"I don't see why that circumstance should concern me so very much, after all," gloomily rejoined the baronet, knocking away the feathery white ash from his cigar.

"Don't you? I do," answered Major Raffington, with a twinkle in his eye. "I should have thought you had cut your eye-teeth long enough ago to have found out that there is sometimes safety, not merely in the multitude of counsellors, but in the multitude of creditors as well. Perhaps it's on the same principle which inspires the proverb that a council of war never fights, but, at any rate, a fellow who is down on his luck had better trust to the forbearance

of the ruck of those to whom he owes money, than depend on that of some one thumping capitalist. When once, however, you are fairly netted, you had better look your position fairly in the face. The Baron, the King, or the Behemoth, whichever you like to call him, is, really and truly, not one half so black as he is painted."

"I'm glad to hear it. Report certainly does lay on the colour with a full brush, as artists say," growled Dashwood, as he twisted his tawny moustache.

"I know him pretty well," pursued the major, "and it is my belief that four-fifths of what is said of him are sheer lies, and that the residue is exaggerated. Like some other of the dons and great-guns in his own line, he can afford to be lenient, and even generous, when he likes, which is precisely what the small fry of the loan-mongers cannot. I could tell you of a dozen instances in which Shylock has been

—I won't say satisfied with less than his bond ; that's common enough, when more can't be had—but liberal to some poor beggar that he had got tight in his clutch, to do as he pleased with. I'm not given to fine phrases ; but if one of ourselves, my lord, or Sir Harry, or the like, had shown as much mercy to a defaulter on the double event as I have known the Behemoth to do to some deep in his books, he would have been canonized by the clubs as the prince of good-fellows. That's all !”

Dashwood flung away the stump of his cigar.

“And when, Raff, am I to have the honour to be presented to this chivalrous king of the money-lenders ?” sneered he. “You are Lord Chamberlain, and understand the etiquette of the thing. I do not. But the sooner I make a spoon or spoil a horn, as the phrase is, the better, for I am sick of suspense, and, besides, I want a little ready cash. Such a Cræsus as you



describe, and a disguised philanthropist to boot, might oblige me with the trifle I require—only three poor hundreds—without boggling about marketable security, surely.”

“Nothing more probable,” coolly replied the major. “I don’t think—for, mind you, I do not know anything of the Baron’s intentions—that he means mischief because he has bought up your floating securities. And if he takes a fellow in hand, he generally stands by him like a trump. As for the meeting, I will introduce you now, if you like, and at this hour we shall be sure to find the Behemoth at his post. You’ve got the papers that I told you would be necessary?—All right. The streets are not bad for walking to-day, and Pitt Street isn’t a very laborious pilgrimage.”

“One word of advice, Fred, my boy,” said Major Raffington impressively, as the two walked together towards the narrow

and gloomy street, in the parish of St. James the Courtley, which towards the close of the last century had been named after the Heaven-born minister ; “ or, rather, two words. Take them in good part, old man, for they are kindly meant, I assure you.”

“ I never heard anything disagreeable that was not supposed to be kindly meant,” answered Dashwood, almost sullenly. “ Well, fire as many shotted guns as you please, Raff, and I promise to consider them as an amicable salute.”


“ Well : don’t lie to him, for he won’t stand it ; and don’t higggle with him, for he won’t bear it. That is all !” returned the major quietly ; and as Dashwood turned and glared at him, he went on, with perfect phlegm : “ You see, dear boy, it’s well to know the country you ride over before you get into the pigskin. Swartz is a very peculiar man to deal with. His hobby, to conduct both sides of a bargain at once, and

to settle the terms of the transaction once for all, and without contradiction. Queer, you'll say."

"Very queer!" struck in Sir Frederick.

"And yet," pursued the major, "I don't call the plan a bad one. It saves time and temper. Give the Behemoth his head, and you will find yourself on the sunny side of the hedge. Dispute with him, as if you were dealing with a pig-jobber for live-pork, and you will be in Queer Street before you've done with him, as some uncommonly knowing gentlemen have been before this. There was a man we both knew—Downie, Fribble Downie—who tried to be too clever, for the Jew, and burnt his fingers, rather!"

"I say, Raff," exclaimed Sir Frederick, with a forced laugh, "while we are on the candid and outspoken line of country, perhaps you'll tell me, confidentially, what percentage you will get from the Behemoth if we do business together? It ought to be a good one."



Major Raffington chuckled with imperturbable good-humour as he passed his arm through Dashwood's. "That little poke, which you meant for a home-thrust, Fred, does not disturb me in the least," was his cool reply: "you would hardly have paid me the compliment of seeking me out as your adviser in this affair, but for the gossip you have heard as to my supposed understanding with the Baron. Now, if I were a humbug, or easy to affront, I should get on my high horse, and inform you that I did not stir in the matter except to render service to an old friend and brother-officer. As it is, I'll tell you the exact truth. I shan't get a sixpence of commission. But Swartz likes to extend his connection, and when I help him to do it, I feel sure that I shall be the better for it in pocket one day or other. I suppose he makes some sort of calculation, but hang me if I know, when I cash his cheque, the precise fashion in which I earned it."

Dashwood's laugh this time was one of hearty amusement. "You are a character, old boy," he said, "and I was an ungrateful beast to be rude to you. This is Pitt Street. I never was in the mouldy old thoroughfare before."

"And here is the Baron's house," responded the major, stopping before one of the tall, narrow, and high-roofed dwellings, begrimed by the smoke of many years, which line the two sides of Pitt Street. "Now, don't forget my advice. He will make a better bargain for you, on the smooth, than you will ever make for yourself if you object to his proposals."

A dismal house it was, with its dirty windows, its blistered area railing, and stained steps, above which stood two preposterous extinguishers of rusty iron, into which many a link and flambeau had been thrust, in the benighted times when gas was not. The door was opened by a white-faced small boy, preternaturally

sharp-featured, slim, and alert, whose page's livery was of the glossiest green cloth, and his sugar-loaf buttons not of vile brass, as are those of so many of these duodecimo male retainers, but resplendent with new gilding. This precociously intelligent urchin grinned benignly on the major, while regarding his companion with a furtive leer. Guided by this gorgeously appparelled imp the two officers ascended the stairs to the second floor, and Dashwood, who looked inquisitively about him, was struck by the incongruities which he beheld. The house would have been much improved by fresh paint, fresh paper-hangings, and fresh air ; but the staircase was draped in thick and soft carpet of costly material, but sober pattern. Cobwebs clung to the cornices, and the walls were blotched by damp ; but the open doors of two or three rooms revealed silken curtains, statues, china, and costly furniture. But the greatest surprise awaited Dashwood when he was inducted

into the presence of the king of the London money-lenders himself.

Sir Frederick, who, unluckily for himself, had been a borrower ever since he had emerged from the halcyon period of legal infancy, was well used to the manners and practices of the majority of those accommodating persons who accelerate the spendthrift's progress down the slippery road to ruin. Some of these philanthropists inhabit squalid dens at least during the hours of business ; others are unwholesome-looking attorneys, whose legitimate profession is a mere screen to their illicit dabbling in post-obits ; but there are a few who dwell in showy sets of chambers, and a smaller minority whose mansions fill their suburban neighbours with admiring envy. Dashwood knew the Behemoth's religion, or, at least, race, and he was prepared to encounter a fleshy-featured Jew, with a hook beak, raven-black hair, and an Oriental addition to emerald breast-pins, brilliant

rings and cable-like watch-chains. Swartz was originally from Frankfort too—that he knew, and might be expected to speak with that Hebrew-German accent, which is only to be heard in perfection in the Judengasse of that *ex* Free City. What Dashwood really saw was a florid gentleman, light-haired, and with trim whiskers of an amber tint, and who, from his dress and demeanour, might easily have been mistaken for a Somersetshire squire, of a more modern type than honest Mr. Western, one who rode a little, and shot a little, and farmed a good deal, but who never allowed his field-sports or his agricultural operations to interfere with his presence in his place in parliament, or in the bay-window of his club. His hands, on which glittered no rings, were pink, plump, and well-cared for ; his teeth were very white, and his small steady eyes were of a dark-blue ; altogether, but for the aquiline nose, and the faintest tinge of foreign accent, no one



could have guessed the Baron to be either an alien or an Israelite. The Behemoth's chamber of audience was a long, low room, formed, no doubt, by some pulling down of party-walls, and here there were no signs of the decay and neglect elsewhere visible. The pictures were few, but choice ; and their gilt frames and the mouldings of the large mirrors contrasted well with the subdued tint' of the pearly French wall-paper, and the sober richness of the Tournay carpet. The furniture and hangings were of pale-blue silk ; and there was even a profusion of works of art, of precious marbles, stained glass, tall vases from Japan, richly inlaid weapons from the East, of books in costly bindings, and of miscellaneous prettinesses in silver, ivory, and bronze. Baron Swartz rose from his chair with a courteous bow and a wave of the hand, as he motioned to his visitors to be seated.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance,

Sir Frederick," he said, with much urbanity; "and, as your time is probably of value, as well as my own, I will not keep you longer in suspense as to what you come about than is unavoidably necessary. The major here, my good friend, yesterday handed to me a written statement—here it is—of the general state of your affairs, which, with a few rectifications, I find to be tolerably correct. Have you the papers which I requested you to bring? Thanks!"

And as the baronet, somewhat sullenly, laid the documents on the table, he felt that the Baron's steady blue eyes were reading him, though with no obtrusive scrutiny, like a printed book.

"Ah, well," said the Behemoth smilingly, as he spread out the papers before him, "I only ask a few minutes—ten, at the outside—while I glance at these. Can you employ them, gentlemen, in the perusal of light, very light literature?" indicating with his plump forefinger a collection of periodi-

cals, illustrated newspapers, and novels in all the freshness of their newly hatched condition. "Or, if Sir Frederick cares for Cuyps and Poussins, perhaps, my dear major, you will do the honours of my little collection. There are some pretty little gems of pastoral landscape, which are no strangers to you."

And without further preface, he began to peruse the documents, making notes on a sheet of paper as he read on. The major and his friend rose, and made the circuit of the room, the former assuming, willingly enough, the office of cicerone, and calling attention to the beauties of this or that valuable painting, without much heed to the evident indifference of the baronet, to whom a bull by Paul Potter, and an over-driven ox on its road to the cattle-market, were objects of equal unconcern.

"I conclude it's all right," at last said Dashwood with a yawn. "I say," he added, with more animation, but below his

breath, "if he lends me any money, he won't insist, will he, on my taking part of the loan in these sort of things? I've known that done before this."

"So have I!" coolly answered the major. "But set your mind at rest, Fred, my boy, for, unless your loan be one worthy of Rothschild, he'll hardly ask you to walk off with these. Did you take the paintings I have been showing you for Wardour Street imitations—Old Masters done to order at thirty shillings! There's not one of these bits of canvas that Swartz has not covered, continental fashion, with gold naps, once, twice, ay, thrice over. Bless you, my dear fellow, do you suppose he lives here out of office hours? Not he! He has a villa at Kensington, that cost Heaven knows what for conservatories and decorations; and the dinners he gives there are royal, sir, for taste and splendour. I've only been asked there once; and as for the company, I assure you——"

But Major Raffington's definition of those who sat around the Baron's mahogany was cut short by the bland voice of the Baron himself.

"Excuse me, gentlemen, for having trespassed so long upon your patience. I shall be happy, as refers to Sir Frederick Dashwood's business with me, to come to the point at once. Pray, sit down. I promise to be brief."

"I may as well say at once, Baron Swartz," said Dashwood, as he resumed his seat, "that I am in pressing want of a small advance at the present time. I cannot explain——"

"My very dear sir," interrupted the Behemoth, again lifting his forefinger, "let me entreat you to spare yourself the unnecessary trouble of even a partial explanation. I never met with a new client who did not require some such slight assistance at the first. What is it to be?—A hundred pounds?—two—three?" And he rustled

over the leaves of his open cheque-book, and, dipping his pen in the ornamental inkstand beside him, smiled upon Sir Frederick with a benevolence that absolutely disconcerted the baronet.

"Three hundred pounds will be sufficient," said the latter, almost sheepishly; "but as regards interest and security——"

"Leave the consideration of both, if you please, to me," said the Baron, again breaking in on the thread of his customer's discourse.

"I told him," said Major Raffington, with soldierly bluntness, "that he would find that the best plan."

"And you were right, my good major," rejoined the Baron. "So, now, with your kind permission, I will state my views. The case, to my poor fancy, lies, as your English lawyers say, in a nutshell. I am now the proprietor of—here they are—all the acceptances, sadly overdue, which Sir Frederick has scattered over London. To

press for immediate payment—" and here the blue eyes fixed themselves very steadily on those other blue eyes, by far the handsomer in shape and hue, but not so piercing or so steady, which belonged to Dashwood—"would put you, my dear sir, to sad inconvenience. I have also a list of liabilities, simple contract debts, mere extracts from tradesmen's ledgers, for which I could compromise, without any bankruptcy or unpleasantness of that sort; and these, on certain conditions, I am willing to discharge. Here is a bill at three months" (hastily filling it up) "for the advance which you require—interest stamp and premium deducted. You receive, in cash, two hundred and forty pounds for your acceptance for three hundred. Naturally, I expect you will be punctual in meeting this demand" (and here the Baron smiled) "when due. This bond, this bill of sale on your horses and furniture—and this agreement to insure your life in such

office as I may select, will, with the additional formality of bills at two and three months respectively, make up the amount of your former securities, which I will return to you cancelled. And I don't think, Sir Frederick, that I could easily have stated terms that should have been less onerous to you, as you probably perceive."

There was a little pause, as Dashwood read over the memorandum of the various sums; he could not but admit, as he signed the required papers, and pocketed the cheque, and cancelled the acceptances, that he was leniently and considerately dealt with.

"A glass of sherry?" said the Baron, and as he touched the knob of a bell within his reach, the page in the green livery brought in the desired refreshment.

"Beats any cellar in London," the major said afterwards of the wine in




question. "He had it a present from some tremendous grandee in Spain.

"Tell me one thing, Raff," said Dashwood, as the pair walked away down Pitt Street ; "what did he let me off so cheaply for? I declare it was a relief when he knocked sixty off the draft for the three hundred. It proved him to be a flesh and blood Hebrew, after all. Still he must have some motive, mustn't he?"

"I suppose so," said the major carelessly ; "most of us have. But as for guessing what the Behemoth's intentions are, that is too hard a nut to crack. I dare say you'll find it out for yourself, some day, dear boy."


## CHAPTER XIII.

### UNDER THE SCREW.

HAT belief which attributes to the spendthrift a soft heart and a genial nature, blemished by the venial drawback of a characteristic inability to say No, deserves a prominent place on the black-list of vulgar errors. Society harbours in her capacious bosom few frozen snakes more prone, when thawed by kindly warmth, to flesh their venomous fangs, than that idle prodigal of whom the word goes forth that he is no man's enemy save his own. In very truth, the profligate insensibly contracts some of the worst qualities of

the buccaneer, and notably that hardness of heart which is the certain result of a long-continued sacrifice of the interests of others, of duty, and of all that is noble in life and aspirations, to the craving idol of self. There is many a gentleman of fair abilities and good manners who hides beneath the mask of nineteenth century conventionalism a greed, a fierceness, and an insensibility to the welfare of others, that would have done credit to the ruthless conquerors of old Peru, or to the pirates who, in after-days, despoiled the spoiler on the wealthy coasts of the Spanish Main.

Dashwood's indignation at being held to ransom, so to speak, by Miss Aphy, or Aphrodite, Larpent grew stronger as he strode through the streets, after his interview with the money-lender. The idea of parting so immediately with the crisp bank-notes that he had so lately received, was excessively painful to him. He was one of those free-handed persons, so called, through



whose fingers money slips rapidly and imperceptibly. But the easy-going man of pleasure, to whom it would be a misery to deny himself any gratification within his reach, and who gives gratuities and submits to over-charges because he prefers shopkeepers to be obsequious, and crossing-sweepers and holders of horses to bless his honour for a generous gentleman, can easily be provoked to fury by a bluff demand for something considerable. Three hundred pounds ! There are those to whom the amount represents almost fabulous wealth, and those to whom it is the easily afforded price of a trained hunter or a carriage from Long Acre. There are others, magnates of the Stock Exchange, or of the swart and sable interests of coal and iron, to whom three hundred sovereigns are as a little loose silver, the fractional fluctuations, from day to day, of Turkish Consolidated; the difference in the price of a myriad tons of rails,

or in a million tons of steam-fuel, from the quotations of yesterday.

Three hundred pounds, to one who was perhaps the neediest baronet numbered in that curious order of hereditary knighthood which King James I. invented for the replenishment of his exchequer and the conquest of Ulster, meant a great deal of money.

"She must take two—hang her! I'm not the only one, I suppose, on whom the screw can be put." So ran Dashwood's thoughts, as he walked moodily northwards. He had not acknowledged to himself that he was bound direct for Great Eldon Street, and this because he felt some instinct warn him that otherwise the cash would forge for itself wings, and fly away beyond his keeping. He belonged to other clubs than the "Flag," institutions where there seemed to be some confusion in the minds of the managers and frequenters between night and day, so frequent was the pulling down

of blinds and the closing of curtains, and the lighting of green-shaded lamps, when Sol himself was vainly volunteering to shine on cards and players around the little green tables. There, at guinea and two-guinea points, with what you pleased upon the rubber, Whist might be worshipped in company with some of the most formidable performers in Europe, men who must surely have had cards for hornbooks and primers, and whose sympathies with courtly life appeared to be reciprocated, so plentiful were king and queen, and, for that matter, knave and ace as well, in the hands that they held. Major Raffington could hold his own among these pundits. Sir Frederick Dashwood, petulant and eager, could not.

There is perhaps something humiliating in the self-admission of a bearded man, that coin, or its representative, burns in his pocket, and that he can no more, unless by some spasmodic effort he places himself beyond temptation, avoid the fascination of

high-play, than a schoolboy can pass the tarts in a pastry-cook's window. But Dashwood, if he felt any qualms on this account, crushed them down. As he reached South Audley Street, he owned to himself that he was about, in his own words, to "pay off the jade, little Larpent, and have done with her;" and as he did so, the veins on his low forehead swelled, and he swore an oath, and clenched his muscular right hand, as he groaned over the unlucky fastidiousness of modern social arrangements, rendering it as they did a matter of quasi impossibility to insure Aphy's silence on easier and cheaper terms. He even paced, angrily, twice or thrice the length of the narrow thoroughfare, to and fro, half mechanically opening and reclosing his strong fingers, as if in the act of compressing a hated throat; but presently he found himself the object of attention to a patrolling policeman, and with a scornful laugh at his own reverie, he turned away.

Great Eldon Street is not very remote from South Audley Street, and at the corner of the former stands a public-house, where stable-helpers, grooms out of employment, mouldy men who polish spoons for lazy giants in livery, and especially mutes and hearse-drivers, quaff their beer, and which is called, indeed, the "Jolly Undertakers." To the private bar of this ill-omened hostelry, Sir Frederick, after vainly glancing around for better accommodation, betook himself, and here in rapid succession he swallowed three fiery thimblefuls of British brandy; and then sallying out, knocked at the door on which was the brass-plate that bore the name of Gulp.

The name of Gulp suggested nothing to the baronet's preoccupied mind, but the number was identical with that inscribed on the card of address which he had received from Violet, and accordingly he knocked.

"Does a Mr. Davis live here, or a Miss



Davis rather—since my business is with her?” demanded Dashwood, who saw only a bundle of middle-aged feminine humanity, strongly perfumed with peppermint and bitters, and topped by a black cap adorned by artificial flowers and straggling curl-papers. But the bundle of humanity suddenly exclaiming: “Evins! Captain Dashwood—at least Sir Frederick, for I would be the last to bilk any nobleman or gentleman of his proper title, as well becomes—to think of your finding me here, and in such a position, along of Betsy Jane!” The visitor opened his eyes wider than before, and began to recognize the bundle.

“I ought to remember you, by Jove! Mrs. Harris—Willis, whatever it is—surely you were housekeeper at Hardup, and nursed me when I was a lad and broke my collar-bone out with Lord Diddleham’s hounds?” he said at last.

“Yes, I was, Sir Frederick. And never did I think to see the day when lodgings

such as these would be my dependence," returned the landlady half hysterically; "for I did hope to live and die along with the noble family I served so faithful. And I held on till most of the other servants had left, along of the execution in Hardup Hall, and my lord and my lady gone to the continent. But you saw me afterwards, sir, at Brighton, when you was quartered there, and used to be a good deal with the Honourable Frederick, who occupied my apartments there—to my sorrow, I regret to say."

And Maria Gulp sobbed in real earnest, as she thought of her little all, absorbed so gracefully by the Hon. Frederick Downie, whom she had known as a curly-headed child in a velvet frock, and who might have had some repugnance, one would have thought, in robbing the soft silly creature who had administered surreptitious comfits to his greedy infancy. Even Dashwood, who now remembered to have heard that

his friend "Fribble Downie" had borrowed and spent the savings of this too trusting follower of the Diddleham family, pitied her a little.

"Yes, I heard of that," he said. "But I hope you get on tolerably, Mrs.——"

"Gulp, Sir Frederick. Not that the word—which is plebeian—was ever used at Hardup; but being what my parents were known by, it is lawfully mine, like Maria," explained the unfortunate householder. "But not wishing to deceive you, sir, I do not get on even tolerably; and what with rent and rates and Her Majesty's tax-gatherer, and hurdygurdies, and butchers' bills, I almost wish I was dead."

"Ah, well, it's a great shame," said Sir Frederick, in whom weariness was overcoming the transitory sentiment of compassion: "and I'm doosed sorry, and some day I'll be glad to hear about it; but I'm in a hurry just now, you see, driven from pillar to post, and every minute is of con-

sequence. Is your present lodger, this Miss Lar—Davis, I mean, in the house?"

The brandy which Sir Frederick had imbibed for the purpose of steadying his nerves, had proved itself, as usual, a double-edged tool, unfit for rash handling, and its effects were palpable to himself at least, for there was a humming in his brain as if of summer flies, and his speech had slightly thickened. Perhaps this last symptom was one familiar to the landlady, for, without any further reference to her own troubles and trials, she proceeded upstairs to the triangular drawing-room, and presently returning, said, with official solemnity, that "Miss Davis" was "at home;" then she ushered the baronet up her darkling stairs. Poor Maria Gulp! her connection with the titled classes had not been much to her ultimate benefit, yet her heart yearned towards her old employers and their guests; nor had she even much of the gall of bitterness to lavish on the boy, grown to be a

man, who had condescended to relieve her of her small economies. Of him she yet spoke with bated breath as the Honourable Frederick. There are creatures so easily tamed that servitude seems with them to be first, rather than what we call second nature. The dog keeps closest to the heels of the worst master. The landlady of Great Eldon Street, sorely tried by duns and disappointment, was yet a sedulous student of the "Morning Post," cared which Lady Blanche married a Peer, and which Lady Flora an iron-master of fabulous wealth; said "Ah dear!" when a well-remembered countess was gathered to her fathers; and grew quite excited over the list of guests at the Duchess of Snowdon's, or the details of the gay doings at the Marchioness of Blunderbore's fancy ball.

"How do you do, Sir Frederick Dashwood?" said the elf, as the baronet's tawny moustaches and handsome face appeared in the doorway. "How kind! to remember

an old friend not exactly moving in the same distinguished circles as yourself! How sorry my brother will be, when I tell him of your visit, to have missed the gratification of seeing you!"

All this for the edification of Mrs. Gulp the landlady, whose former acquaintance with Dashwood she did not in the least suspect, and for the discomfiture of Sir Frederick, whom Miss Larpent judged, and rightly judged, to be unwilling that his sufficiently well-known name should be publicly mentioned in a place to which he would probably prefer that his visit should be wrapped in mystery. Dashwood had indeed kept floating before his brain some hazy idea of having himself announced as Jones, or Robinson, when Mrs. Gulp's recognition had dispelled his incognito; but he partially appreciated Miss Larpent's motive, and scowled as he bowed.

"I have but lately heard that you were

in London," he said awkwardly, and then held out his hand.

That mechanical impulse by which we extend the hand of good-fellowship, as often as not, to those whom we loathe or despise, is so much a product of our actual state of civilization, that it is commonly accepted as it is offered, as a thing unmeaning. But Miss Larpent, quick-sighted, and prompt to snatch at an advantage, as women often are, did not take Sir Frederick's hand. She swept him a courtesy such as might formerly have been performed on the slippery floors of the palace at Versailles, such as, perhaps, she had learned from French Canadians, in her own land over-sea, and then motioned him to a chair, as composedly as if she had been a princess, and he a courtier of somewhat lower degree. And Mrs. Gulp slowly closed the door.

"It was kind of you, Sir Frederick," she repeated, smiling on him, while her neutral-tinted eyes scanned him narrowly. The

onus of speaking to the point was manifestly to be thrown on the visitor. A fresh flush of anger at the thought mounted to his cheek, and he set his teeth hard, and a wrathful gleam was in his blue eyes; but yet he bent his head a very little, and contrived to smile in answer to the beaming expression on the false face opposite to him. He was rapidly shaking off, however, the effect of the drams which he had swallowed, as men do sober themselves, by some instinct of self-preservation, in the presence of danger; so that while Aphy, perceptive according to the gifts of her sex, thought within herself: "He has been drinking, and will be violent, and then maudlin," her opponent was really conquering, not merely the fumes of liquor, but his own innate tendency to petulance. Such temporary victories over self are not infrequent. The worthless tippler on shore is sometimes changed by the very sight of blue water, and becomes a careful seaman until paid off



at the end of the voyage. The brawling pest of the barrack-yard is steady as a rock under fire, brisk on the march, and helpful in the bivouac, until sloth and drink bring again into prominence the worst side of his versatile nature.

"You know my errand here, Miss Larpent," began Dashwood, "and you can guess, perhaps, how difficult it has been to me to comply in any respect with your wishes. It is town-talk, I believe, that my grandfather left me little or nothing, that I have all my old debts on my shoulders, and that I no more know what is to end this hand-to-mouth existence, than I know what the weather will be next week. Do you believe that?"

"Yes, I believe that, Captain Dashwood," answered Miss Larpent guardedly. "Not that I have much reason," she added, in a different tone, "for putting faith in what you fine gentlemen find it expedient to say to such as myself. But I believe


that you have found the inheritance of old Sir George by far less profitable than you expected it to be, and that you have sold your soul, in fact, for nothing." This time he did not redden, but grew a shade paler than before, yet never a muscle of his fair face quivered, and his voice was unshaken as he replied :

"The less you and I have to do with unpleasant reminiscences, the better. Now, Miss Aphy—excuse the familiarity—we were all pretty familiar as to calling by Christian names, and nicknames too, in Canada ; it has cost me more trouble than you can conjecture to bring you a brace of hundreds, and, by Jove ! I feel in parting with them as a drowning man might feel at letting go the plank he clings to. What security have I that the payment of this hard-got money will put an end to your demands ? How do I know—pardon me !—that you will leave Violet, or myself, in peace for the future ?"

"I will tell you, Sir Frederick Dashwood," said the elf, whose eyes never for an instant left his, "why you may rely, within certain limits, on my discretion, and on that of my brother Bruce. Up to this moment our acquaintance with your secret has been merely a passive knowledge; but so soon as I shall have taken your pay to be silent, we become, in the eyes of the law, what the law is so uncivil as to call accom——"

"Hush! that's dangerous talk," hurriedly broke in the baronet, on whose brow the heat-drops were now standing, while he glanced distrustfully around. "No one knows, in a lodging-house, what ears are listening. I remember your landlady, the woman of the house, for years, when she was housekeeper at Lord Diddleham's, and, what is worse, she remembers me, and may chatter."

"And the consequences, Captain Dashwood—you see the old name comes the



readier to my uncourtly tongue," said Miss Larpent, with malicious exultation—"the consequences might be exceedingly embarrassing. You are a baronet, after all, and your title jingles prettily enough to enhance the delight which people feel at a shocking story which does not affect themselves. How the newspapers would gloat over——"

"Have done with this, woman!" exclaimed Dashwood roughly, as he started from his seat, "unless you want to drive me mad. Did I ever do you any harm, Miss Larpent, that you torture me with taunts which, if a man dared to utter, I would——" He paused, frowning, while the veins on his forehead swelled; and the fierce light in his eyes, and the manner in which he clutched the chair on which he leant, until the frail wood-work creaked and trembled under the pressure of his strong fingers, sufficiently completed the half-spoken sentence.

"Whether you have done me any harm

Sir Frederick," returned the elf fearlessly, "is best known to yourself. I have a shrewd suspicion that your advice to your friend Lovelace, to regard little Aphy Larpent as a plaything to be flung aside when wearied of, and his dread of your sneers and ridicule, helped to harden his weak and fickle heart against me when I knelt at his feet, and bathed them with my tears, in vain. I would have made him a good wife, believe it or not, as you list. But a truce to sentiment! I am not made of very tender stuff, and do not often indulge in tender regrets for my lost happiness, or the world's approval. Chance has given me a hold on you, and I do not choose to slacken my gripe, save on my own terms. You spoke, just now, of two hundred pounds; my demand was for three."

"You don't suppose," said Dashwood sullenly, "that with me, or from me, to ask is to have, or that a man with my unlucky reputation can draw upon the Jews as your City grandees drop into the parlour

of the Bank of England for discount ! Here are two hundred pounds ready, if you'll sign me a receipt, and hard enough it was to rake as much together. Refuse it, and you may wreak your spite as you please, but never a shilling of profit will come to sweeten your pleasure."

His mind, such as it was, was quite made up, and, as often happens, the immediate motive for his desperate resolve was the desire to keep for his own use a portion of what he had obtained from the Behemoth. The two hundred he must disgorge, but for the sake of these remaining fifty pounds he would brave the worst. Miss Larpent's quick wits divined somewhat of this, and she remembered that policy forbade her to strain the chain to breaking.

"I agree, as respects the money," she said; "but I have another boon to ask. It will cost you nothing beyond a little diplomacy," she hastened to add. "I am, as you know, a first-rate musician,

and teach singing better than many of the foreigners who grow rich in London on your English gold. You have a young cousin—Miss Beatrice Fleming—and Lady Livingston is wealthy; contrive that I shall be allowed to give some music-lessons at the Fountains. You need tell no more of my history than you please; and with a little tact, the thing can be arranged, since I have set my heart on it; no matter why. Come, a fair exchange: my receipt against the bank-notes and your written promise that I shall be music-mistress to the dowager's heiress. Here are pen and ink, and we need not delay."

"It was wisest so," said Aphy to herself, as she looked from the window after the baronet's retreating figure; "the man was growing blindly furious like a bull maddened by the darts of the *chulos* in some torida of Mexico. Give him a little more rope, and then—hang him!"

END OF VOL. I.







